WITCHCRAFT in Western India

Sohaila Kapur

Orient Longman

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In most cultures the belief in and worship of the powers of evil runs parallel with religious belief and worship. India is no exception. This interesting and revealing study of witchcraft in Western India describes the beliefs and practices of various sects and communities of the region. A number of self-proclaimed godmen and faith-healers talk about their methods of 'curing' victims of black magic, and the victims themselves narrate their spine-chilling experiences. A detailed chapter on Tantra magic is included.

The study is not only descriptive, but also analyzes intelligently the reasons for and effects of belief in black magic.

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PREFACE

This book is not a 'do it yourself' witchcraft manua! My experience has been that ghosts, witches and ghouls do not exist—except in fertile imaginations—and they will continue to be non-existent until scientifically proven otherwise. In 1978, while doing a series of articles on exorcism rituals in Kerala, I came across many self-styled practitioners of the occult, who could not convince me about the authenticity of the rites. It was then that I was purged of any ambivalent notions that I may have harboured.

It is possible that what is esoterically termed the supernatural today, may be discovered to be simple laws of physics by the more sophisticated scientific techniques of tomorrow. In fact, research in the field has already begun. 'Unusual' phenomena such as telepathy, coincidence, telekinesis and hypnotism, discussed in so many science journals as well as in fictional writings, are finally being tested to see if there is any substance in them. Research on telepathy is reportedly being carried out in Russia, under the auspices of its intelligence department. Scientists—both Russian and American—feel that telepathy may be a potent war weapon of the future. But unless these phenomena are established and verified scientifically, interest in the occult will continue spreading obscurantist ideas that would never allow the establishment of an enlightened society, based on egalitarian principles. Mysticism is a weapon that is being used by the economically and politically powerful to subjugate the poor and illiterate Indian masses. True, a majority of our affluent minority is also superstitious, but the exploitation of the poor and of the well-off, in this context, is not equal. The rich have their wealth which can buy the best of education (for this reason their resort to superstitions is inexcusable, while the uneducated poor are the easy victims of unscrupulous priests and politicians who exploit their ignorance to obstruct their political and social development.

For the majority of the Indian masses superstition is very much woven into their pattern of existence. They are made to believe that unless gods, devils and their human counterparts are propitiated with material goods and unquestioning faith, they will be worse off than they already are.

Why then did I do extensive research in witchcraft, if I was not aiming at a gullible readership eager for a good old bedtime scare? Firstly, in investigating these rituals, I was studying a very deep-rooted and integral part of Indian culture, that has formulated the attitudes and life styles of the people for centuries.

Secondly, though I cannot boast of any original anthropological thesis with my limited knowledge—my resources having been my own experiences on the West Coast and the books on the subject that I consulted—I have attempted a logical explanation for these rituals and the reason why they still persist, despite having outlived their utility.

Please note that the phrase 'principle of similarity' has been used often in the book and in two different contexts.

The first is mentioned as part of Sir James Frazer's terminology, underlying what, according to his critics, was his belief in the primitive man's faith in a kind of telepathic communication between the magician and his victim.

When I use the term to describe a ritual, without reference to Frazer or his critics, it denotes the primitive's imitation of nature, or, better still, the primitive's philosophy of the similarity between natural and human processes.

Certain points and terms have been repeated throughout the book. This has been done deliberately in order to keep on relating the facts or practices described to a particular analytical standpoint.

The sources that I am indebted to are:

Tantra Yoga by Nik Douglas
The Illustrated Golden Bough by Sir J. G. Frazer
Witchcraft by Captain Colaabavala with reference to special cases.
The Encyclopaedia Britannica
Begone Godmen by Dr. Abraham Kovoor
Totem And Taboo by Sigmund Freud

Anthropological Approaches To The Study of Religion: edited by Michael Banton. Particular reference to Melford C. Spiro's chapter on "The Practice of Religious belief".

Newspaper cuttings from the Times of India Library.

Lokayata by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya.

The Notes section at the end of the book is very important, and I hope that readers will refer to it.

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1 Introduction

Definition

Witchcraft is believed to be magic. Magic refers to 'a ritual performance or activity that is thought to lead to the influencing of human and natural events by an external and impersonal mystical force beyond the ordinary human sphere' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The so called 'influencing' of events is not accomplished by the individual practising magic. The rites and ceremonies that he undertakes in the nature of magic are merely symbolic expressions of what he wants done. Mantras or incantations that accompany such a ceremony are the prayers and petitions to supernatural powers to achieve those ends. The work is thus believed to be done by the deity or spirit, after receiving 'directions' through the rituals. Hence, watering the ground while chanting incantations is equivalent to giving guidelines, to the deity being propitiated, about making it rain.

Though basically magic is thought to be a neutral term, witchcraft and sorcery (with the exception of white magic) are usually forms of destructive magic. Both witchcraft and sorcery involve the tapping of supernatural powers through prayers and petitions, usually for evil purposes. Present day anthropologists, however, make a subtle distinction between the two. The witch is classified as a 'weird' and 'aberrant' person, who 'moves through an obscure compulsion or spirit possession', while a sorcerer is an ordinary person 'using deliberate techniques and external means familiar to other adult members of the community' and is moved generally by simple ill-will (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). But for most intents and purposes, the two terms are synonymous. Sorcery or witchcraft are terms employed to refer to activity that is antisocial and illegitimate--resorted to by persons who will not or cannot use arbitration or litigation to settle issues that have unsettled them physically, economically or emotionally.

There is another aspect of witchcraft known as white magic which is a positive aspect. When witches or sorcerers pursue beneficial aims, like healing the sick, causing rainfall or a bumper harvest, ridding the community of ghosts and unwanted people, their rituals are called 'white' witchcraft. A typical example of white witchcraft or 'clean' magic on the West Coast of India was the famous rain making *yagna* in Kerala during 1975. Numerous occult pundits participated in a mass propitiation ceremony for a much needed wet spell. This example also focusses on a significant aspect of white magic. Most rituals belonging to this category are also performed for the express purpose of stating and maintaining the culture and organization of the particular society. As the Malabar Coast in Kerala is inhabited by a predominantly agricultural community, the rain-making ceremony performed the function of stressing the importance of rain, of agriculture, and consequently, of the cultural activities associated with the latter.

The evil aspect of witchcraft, also known as black magic, plainly believes in power at the expense of others. It includes murder either as part of a sacrificial ritual, or as an act of revenge.

Divination and taboo are two other aspects of magic. Divination is basically prophecy (forecasting future events) and it is neither negative nor positive magic. Its function, unlike witchcraft and sorcery, is not to influence events, but to 'understand' them. Divination is generally indulged in by those who are thought to be possessed by a ghost, a spirit, or a deity. Taboo is an important and negative precept of magic. Unlike black magic, it is not negative in the sense of being 'bad', 'evil' or 'immoral' (though these terms are also subjective; for a practice considered immoral by one community, may be entirely acceptable for another). It is negative in that the practitioner abstains from certain foods or actions in order to keep evil at bay.

The most important function of taboo is the protection of a community or of its leaders—generally priests and *babas*. Taboo, in this sense, has a dual role to play. In fact, to "protect", it imposes restrictions.

The nature of a sacred object is that it imposes restrictions on those who come into contact with it (taboos), it is worshipped,

Take for example the dual attitude towards menstrual blood. Menstruating women were initially worshipped and still are, in tantric practice, because menstrual blood signifies procreation, hence life; but they are also considered polluted, and in some communities are confined to a room for the duration of their period. In South India, they are forbidden at those times to enter temples. According to one opinion, the pollution aspect came into being during the development of the patritineal tendencies in society, something we follow to this day (see Chapter 15: Conclusion).[1]

Another example of taboo is the Brahmin tantric of Kerala, who, while practising tantra magic, abstains from non-vegetarian foods and from sex, while his counterpart of the left-handed path (discussed in the chapter on tantra) indulges in both as a sacred rite. One man's taboo, in this case, becomes another man's ritual.

Spiritual leaders of all kinds are protected by taboo. Even a number of ordinary witches have acquired a kind of religious sanction—for instance tantrics, who are affectionately known as 'babas' or 'sadhus'. Devotees are expected to observe taboo-like rituals such as not touching their garments, possessions, etc. Women, mostly, are asked to observe these taboos, as their 'touch' is thought to be polluting to these 'spiritual' gurus. The taboos in this case are observed to 'protect' the mantrics and tantrics from the 'harm' of other people's jealousies and even sexual temptation (hence the taboos observed by women) which could easily drag the 'superior' down to the level of the ordinary man.

The supposed divinity or god-man is believed to have powers that guarantee the worshippers the 'continuance and orderly succession of those physical phenomena, upon which mankind depends for subsistence'. Naturally, the life and health of the god-man would be a matter of anxious concern to the devotees whose own welfare is bound to his. So the god-man himself must comply with taboos. He is forced to comply on penalty of dismissal, since bad luck is believed to follow the infraction of taboos. His followers have too great a stake in his life to let him play fast and loose with it, and consequently with theirs. In this way both 'master' and 'children' are bound by a strong framework of rules.

Certain fertility rites are basically ritualized taboos guarding the chief acts of life—births, initiation, marriage and sexual functions—against human interference. Others are taboos securing human beings against the wrath or power of gods and spirits. These involve rites at the cemetery, or even simple ones at home, involving a vegetarian diet and the propitiation of a deity. A violated taboo it is believed, avenges itself. Most women who refuse to touch food on certain days of the week believe that the deity whom they are propitiating by the fast would 'punish' them if they broke it even once.

In Kerala, the spirit Kuttichathan is believed to take its revenge on people who stop propitiating it. If a cock is not regularly sacrificed with appropriate incantations, Kuttichathan is believed to cause misery to the family with his horrendous pranks. Taboos have such strong roots in the human mind, that a man would rather starve himself to death than eat, if a taboo forbids him to do so. Violations of taboos are also punished by the local religious leaders or magicians (god-men) held in awe by the populace. Sometimes, a superstitious community punishes the offender in order to save itself from the wrath of the offended deity or spirit. The person is turned out of the community and left to fend for himself. Dangers resulting from the violation of a taboo may be exorcized through acts of penance and ceremonies of purifications (ritual baths in sacred waters, shaving one's head, starving oneself, etc.).

The old savage taboos, resting on the basis of direct relations between individuals, remain unchanged in substance, but have been 'outwardly transformed into ethical precepts with a religious or supernatural sanction'. For example, thieving, committing adultery or murder, were initially considered taboo in order to propitiate the gods. Today there are ethical laws against them, which have not only been codified for purposes of administrative governance, but also have religious sanction.

Witchcraft and religion in many ways are similar—some magical rites of yesterday have today acquired religious sanction. Yet there are basic differences between the two. While religion lays stress on bettering oneself, on life after death, and on the human soul merging with the Cosmic Consciousness ('God' in plain terms), magic aims at material prosperity. Magic, as pointed out

earlier, is action which symbolically expresses a human desire or wish, the fulfilment of which is otherwise beyond the competence of the ordinary man. This is specially the case in technologically limited societies, where answers to problems are seen in terms of animistic rituals, rather than scientific solutions.

The practice of religion too involves the propitiation of gods for the fulfilment of desires, but religion deals more with man's 'other worldly' connection and life after death, whereas magic is practised to fulfil more worldly desires. To the philosopher, magic appears to have shallower goals than religion, but it is also more practical.

The initial utility of magical rites is today obsolete. Previously, community rites brought men close together in a rudimentary form of society.[2]

The Functions of Witchcraft

Magic, according to Freud, serves varied purposes. It must subject the processes of nature to the will of man, protect the individual against enemies and dangers and give him the power to injure his enemies. One of the major functions performed by witchcraft is the 'productive' function, which has to do with the successful harnessing of nature's resources. In this case, witchcraft is resorted to in order to ensure a successful outcome to a productive human activity—for example, magic which is performed to bring about a good harvest or increase the food supply. This kind of 'white' magic generates confidence in the people of modern day societies that are still technologically backward.

'Protective' magic is also positive in nature and is one of the important reasons for the active belief in magic. The cohesive nature of this type of magic brings the members of a community practising it socially closer. This kind of magic involves practising rituals to prevent or remove danger to either an individual or the community as a whole. What is known as destructive magic, in this context, can also be used for constructive purposes, like ridding the community of the curse of a jealous or vindictive sorcerer. Calamities like drought, a contagious disease, etc. affecting the whole community are often blamed on an enemy

who is believed to indulge in black magic in order to destroy their community. Protective magic is also practised to protect the community from the vagaries of nature. These rituals, again, give people the confidence to continue with their normal way of life. (The basic force behind these rituals, I repeat, is the belief that they are genuine and, if properly performed, they will induce the deity to intervene and save the community.) 'Protective' rituals are generally performed by societies yet untouched by the economic, social, political and scientific revolutions brought about by industrialization.

Destructive or black magic used for harming people is the outcome of the basest desires of man, which nevertheless are an integral part of human nature. In the absence of technology that can satisfy most of man's material needs, poverty, hunger, dissatisfaction, and the lack of social mobility, which is characteristic of primitive communities (victims of suffocating customs, and kinship ties that have long become redundant): all contribute to the focussing of frustrated economic, political and social ambitions into hatred and anger against one's own kin. Instead of anger against the system that keeps them ignorant and therefore, exploitable, the anger turns against individuals and its only outlet becomes the destruction of the hated one or ones through rites. The supplicant really believes that it will work. Occasionally it functions another way. The hostility a person feels towards others sometimes arouses feelings of shame and moral anxiety in him. In such a case, the victim of these guilt feelings conveniently passes the burden of responsibility for his hostility to a 'spirit', which is then exorcized, thereby clearing the person's conscience. In this way, the person hopes to be forever rid of those destructive feelings. The activity is purely psychological. The drama of the exorcism, with its palliative of auto-suggestion, serves to numb the victim to his or her motives, which would otherwise lead a painful existence in the consciousness. Hostility is thus satisfied symbolically by giving it the name of a ghost which is then expelled. Both the processes of exorcism and propitiation have been discussed later in the book in reference to the exorcism phenomenon of the Chottanikara temple.

Destructive magic, or rather, the threat of it also helps to bring errant individuals 'to heel'. By putting the fear of a curse in them, they are forced to refrain from activities that may jeopardize the socio-political structure of the community. This type of taboo works like our tabulated laws, the infringement of which could mean penalty. The style of coercive implementation of these unwritten laws may be primitive, but it works just as well. This is the manner in which the Nambudiris (exorcists) and temple priests keep a firm control over the people in Malabar. The fear of violating God's laws (as interpreted by the priests) keeps the money pouring into the temple coffers.

Destructive magic also has a political role to play. A person can conveniently be charged with witchcraft to ruin his political career. He can also be socially ostracized. This again maintains a social control over persons inclined to rebel against the customs and traditions of the community.

All magic, whether legitimate, or illegitimate, has four elements:

a. The performance of rituals.
b. The use of material substances and objects that have symbolic significance, such as hair, nails, etc.; generally materials belonging to the victim, in the case of black magic, and vessels and other objects in the case of white witchcraft.
c. The chanting of prescribed spells.
d. The prescribed condition of the performer—in other words, the taboos and restrictions incumbent upon the practitioner (and not only on his devotees) by virtue of his being the 'spiritual' leader responsible for 'actualizing' the aspirations of the people.

Magic has been an integral part of all known religious systems at all stages of historical development, although the degree of importance given to it varies considerably. This explains its existence today even in industrially developed nations.

But it is more operative in underdeveloped nations like India, where communities still live under the same primitive socio-economic conditions. Also, India breeds a tradition of unquestioning belief in 'elders' and 'superiors'—the latter being represented by those with superior social and economic status. This reverence

for the wealthy and the powerful has contributed to the oppression of the people. It is in the interest of the ruling class to promote obscurantism. By their doing so, the common people become deprived of the opportunity to challenge their authority and the ideas they represent.

Though witchcraft has lost its initial utility, authoritarianism and economic exploitation and its resultant ignorance have yet to die out.

For the object of this study in witchcraft, I selected only a part of the vast country—a region where a sizeable chunk of Indian witchcraft beliefs and rituals originated. An understanding of the witchcraft culture prevalent in the West coast of India will foster an understanding of the similar motives and forces behind witchcraft practices in the rest of the country. The incidents may be different, but the fundamental premise and the abstract principles inherent in those beliefs are basically the same. Under the West Coast, I have covered Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Goa.

2 Animism and the Practice of Snakecraft

Magic originated at the dawn of history. In fact it is believed that magic existed in the prehistoric stage of human evolution. Many cave paintings and engravings of semi-human figures, hunting and practising sorcery, have been discovered, but owing to a lack of reliable data, this conclusion can be treated as mere 'interpretative conjecture'.[1]

But there is written proof of witchcraft having been practised in the later stages, when the art of writing had developed. Recorded examples of spells have been discovered, some of them on papyrus scolls, dating back to the 1st and 4th centuries A.D. and of Mesopotamian and Graeco-Egyptian origin. Though the modes of thought of these cultures have been called 'prelogical'. today's civilized man chants similar incantations, and he performs his nefarious rituals unconsciously driven by the same primitive compulsions as was his early ancestor, even if those needs and requirements have today lost their original utility value. Insecurity still reigns supreme, whether it be of a social, political, or economic nature. In such situations old habits of ascribing or arrogating supernatural powers to a deity survive. Animal worship is an integral part of this phenomenon.

Some of the cave paintings of primitive man that have been discovered clearly depict animals with human aspects Animal attributes such as physical strength, grace, ferocity, survival techniques, enhanced senses—feared, admired and coveted by man—were personified and defied. In time, worship became ritual and all the qualities of these animal 'gods' came to be considered supernatural. Snakes, which are in profusion in the jungles of

the Indian West Coast, came to be worshipped similarly. The poisonous bite, agility and hypnotic stare of the snake, specially the cobra, came to be feared and respected, and men began worshipping the snake as a propitiatory gesture. Today the snake has been put on a pedestal like other Indian 'animal' gods —Ganesha, Garuda, the lion, etc. The snake 'god' is believed to possess an ambivalent nature. Both powers and perils emanate from its being. If worshipped, it blesses its devotee, and if not propitiated, it can curse him with physical and mental afflictions and even death. Most Hindu gods, in fact, are believed to possess two aspects—the productive and the destructive. This universal belief in the ambivalence of gods is a reflection of human nature. The gods created by man have been made in his image and are hence subject to the same impulses (good as well as evil) as humans. In this capacity, they are also considered sponsors and practitioners of sorcery as well as subject to its power.

Closely similar to the snake and *devata* phenomenon of the Malabar is an ancient Greek belief in Diana or Artemis, Goddess of hunting and chastity, who was also supposed to sponsor sorcery under cover of night.

The twin natures are even more pronounced in the deities worshipped during the practice of witchcraft. Which aspect of the deity gains the upper hand depends entirely on the intentions of the magician and the aspect on which the emphasis is placed during ritual worship.

In the green heart of rural Kerala, near the village of Tiruvilvamala in Cochin district, stands a Rama temple, proudly erect, with the usual canopies of sculptured gods busy in love-play. A humbler temple stands in the courtyard—an antiquated tree dedicated to a snake god. The base of the tree is peppered with *kumkum* and stones of interesting shapes and sizes—depicting the god and his ancillaries. The villagers tread this ground warily, for this god is feared as much for his mercurial temper as he is revered for his magnanimity.

A snake bite here is not considered just an ordinary wound—it is believed to be imbued with the spirit of a vengeful god, and

exorcism-like rituals are required to cure the victim. Here, the already thin dichotomy between good and evil, inherent in Hindu religion, collapses. This is thought to happen when a black magician controls the snake throngh powerful mantras and forces it to do his bidding, or when a human foot tramples it, however unwittingly. Areas of Maharashtra closer to the coast have a similar belief in 'snake possession'. Two grizzled old exorcists of Khopoli, some eighty km south of Bombay, proudly claim to have cured hundreds of such cases. They are brothers and have been in the business of 'spells and spirits' for the past three decades. The younger and more prosperous of the two, G. G. Sakhare or 'Dadaji', as he is affectionately called, has quit the profession because of his "failing health". He now shunts wearily between his smart hotel and his home, spending his spare time in the 'enervating' company of goddess Kali—the patroness of the occult. A temple dedicated to her has been squeezed into the tiny Sakhare courtyard. Grey-blue eyes fixed abstractly on me, Dadaji in a throaty voice begins explaining the basis of his much talked about 'powers' of exorcism.

"It is the Kundalini Shakti or the sex-energy force that is responsible. It is also called the serpent power, since its structure resembles that of a coiled serpent." The Kundalini, says Sakhare, is energy with great potential—possessing the power and suppleness of a tightly coiled spring. When released, it is said to transport an individual to unfathomable heights of spiritual ecstasy.

Bliss or superconsciousness is achieved only when the Kundalini rises from its resting place, in the *mooladhara chakra* based below the genitals and above the rectum, to the *sahasrara chakra,* based at the top of the head. The ardous upward toil of the Kundalini, helps a man achieve paranormal powers—the higher the 'serpent' climbs, the greater the powers. *Samadhi* or salvation corresponds to the Kundalini reaching the sahasrara chakra.

Dadaji claims to have developed his powers through a similar awakening of his Kundalini. His philosophy has been borrowed from that of tantra yoga, where the need for prodding the Kundalini in order to attain the blissful or 'superconscious' state is

also emphasized. (Yogic tantra has been explained in a separate chapter.)

"I worked my Kundalini through my will power and, of course, the mantras given to me by my guru when I was only 25 years of age. The Kundalini now lies dormant because I have retired and have no use for it." Evidently Dadaji was suggesting a kind of see-saw operation, in which the Kundalini, when not worked upon, lethargically slips into its resting-place, the 'mooladhara chakra'.

Fumbling in the dim corridors of his memory, the 77 year old 'snake-specialist' recalls the case of film music director Vasant Desai's servant, once brought to him in a coma. Apparently, a reproachful snake had bitten the boy, when he had unknowingly stepped on it. Cow-urine sanctified by mantras was splashed both on his face and his seat, to 'cleanse' them. (Cow urine incidentally is considered a purifying agent, since the cow is holy to the Hindus.) The question and answer session now began. The snake-spirit was asked its name and the reason why it had bitten the boy.

Generally, at this juncture, the spirit says that it has struck the victim because it has been trod on, or because a black magician has sent it. This one remained stubbornly reticent. (The poor boy probably lacked a vivid imagination.)

At which point, Dadaji employed the only other remedy he knew—giving the victim a sound thrashing. "Actually only the spirit within was injured," he hurriedly explained. "The wounds on the victim's body were only incidental, since the cane makes contact with flesh first."

What Dadaji did not or could not explain was that this method was a simplistic though cruel interpretation of the distraction theory. The sharper pain produced by Dadaji's lashing distracted the patient from his initial pain, that of the snake-bite and its accompanying hysteria brought on by a fear of death. For Dadaji, it was simply part of the 'magical' solution. The cure itself was brought about by drawing out the poison and administering the appropriate drugs. Yet the patient believed himself to be cured by the grace of Dadaji's super-

natural powers. A thrashing is generally resorted to in cases of 'possession'. The other kinds of rituals which include violence, sexual and otherwise, are discussed later in the book.

A number of times, the snake-spirit has been evicted by a fit of coughing. The popular belief is that the mouth is a ghost's favourite place of entry and exit (literally, one 'swallows' a ghoul).

Another imaginative method of curing snake-bites is the manipulation of a knife, accompanied by mantras, over water. The spirit of a devata is thus infused into the water, which is then splashed onto the victim's face. If the good spirit does not succeed in ousting the evil one, then a talisman or *taweez* is tied around the person's arm or waist. A taweez generally has a holy word or the photo of a deity attached to it. This is believed to counteract the evil influence under which one may fall.

The cobra has the deadliest bite, which is very difficult to cure, says Sakhare. While suffering the pain of the poison, the victim's behaviour can take an unprecendented turn. He cited one such instance of a man who cheerfully battled half a dozen people and then proceeded to bite one of them. His action, according to Sakhare, "was not unusual in that state". The stick was wielded and the man was promptly cured! Here again it is impossible to accept that a man bitten by no less than a cobra can be cured by just a beating. In the absence of any conclusive evidence of such a magical cure, one can only assume that Dadaji beat the man to overpower him and then drew out the poison by some other means, physical rather than mystical. Obviously the bite was not as deadly as Dadaji made it out to be, or the man would not have survived the beating. It is even possible that a non-poisonous snake, mistakenly believed to be a cobra, was responsible for it.

Sakhare, however, is cautious about the severity of the beating that is meted out. A severe beating can also injure the body housing the spirit, he warned. He also claims to be able to predict the death of a patient, even before touching him. "Such a case, I know, is hopeless." Otherwise it usually takes Sakhare five minutes to exorcize a person, but if the case is "complicated" it sometimes takes a whole day.

The key to his 'powers', he says, is his worship of Surya Narayana (the sun). Staring at it transmits energy into the body, he claims. This concept of 'sun power' has been borrowed from the old yogic custom of *Surya-namaskar* in which one faces the sun, chanting prayers. Though it became merely ritualistic, later, its basis is scientific, for it presupposes that the sun's rays are good for the body. Today we too acknowledge that these rays are an excellent stimulus for the body's production of Vitamin D. An 'emancipated' guru, Sakhare refuses to distribute rosaries or *vibhuti* (holy ash). "The biggest temple is man himself and going to temples hardly solves one's problems—only god's grace does," he concludes, with the air of a messiah.

If snakes signify vengeance, they also play cupid. The Pannan community of Kerala bury live green snakes in the ground, leaving their heads sticking out of the ground like saplings. The exposed, gaping mouths are stuffed with the seeds of a particular plant. Long after the snakes are dead, seedlings supposedly grow and sprout leaves. On a full moon night, the Pannan black magician steals out naked into the night, plucks the leaves, grinds them and smears the paste on his or her own forehead. Kallur Nambudiripad—head of the famous Kallur *mana* (house) of exorcists—says: "This paste is a love charm and its victim will succumb like a lamb to every desire of the black magician's. In fact, there have been cases, where normally reserved men and women have gone berserk and surrendered themselves totally to the lust-crazed wizard."

Certain *beejamantras* ('seed' or basic mantras, from which develop the more complicated mantras, and which are used as prefixes to the longer ones), if attached to a complete incantation, enhance the power of a love charm, he added. KLIM, for instance, is said to be a particularly powerful beejam. The mantrics who practice white magic use this beejam to bring together estranged couples, while the black magician uses it for enticing other peoples' spouses!

3 The Death Dealers

Eighty year old Sakhare senior, Dadaji's elder brother, has his own repertoire of chilling tales. Owner of a comparatively dilapidated hotel, he is willing to do more than merely scratch the surface of the topic. His wealthier younger brother, mentioned earlier, has donned the cloak of respectability and refuses to acknowledge even a passing reference to black magic.

Incidentally, most magicians—whether white or black, are reputed to have an intimate knowledge of the black art, whether or not they practise it. Their indulgence in white witchcraft used as a counter-weapon to black magic, essentially entails a basic knowledge of black rituals.

The older Sakhare admits to a knowledge of black magic, though he swears never to have practised it. Despite his age, his sight and hearing are excellent and his eyes become tiny electric sparks when discussing the profession, the study of which has been his life-long passion.

"A well-known ritual in Maharashtra for mastering spirits involves infant corpses," begins Sakhare. "The corpse should be exhumed from its grave and then washed in milk. The contaminated milk should then be collected in a bowl, converted into ghee and then used in a lamp which is kept alight continously for 41 days. The corpse, meanwhile, is dressed in a brand-new set of clothes and reburied. During the crucial 41 days, the black magician prays, meditates and cajoles the spirit of the corpse to materialize before him. If the concentration is intense, the spirit appears before him and, like Aladdin's genie, enquires about the master's 'wishes'. The spirit is then a slave of the black magician, trapped to do his bidding for as long as the man desires."

The pampering of a corpse with a milk-bath and new clothes is done in order to please its spirit. The ghee made out of the milk, since it has touched the corpse, is believed to contain the corpse's essence. Hence, when it is put into a lamp and lit, it, along with the powerful incantations, does the job of compelling the spirit to return to earth.

Revenge is often the reason why people turn to witchcraft. *Mooth marana* or murder from a distance, is a method of getting even with ones enemies. It is feared in certain regions of Maharashtra. It is also employed by Tantrics dabbling in black magic. A few grains of rice or millet are activated by mantras and flung into the air. This stuff, once airborne, is believed to outdistance the fastest jet in its search for the victim. It 'discovers' him finally (how it manages to, is anybody's guess!) and lunges at him. It hits the man with such impact that he collapses and dies. The 'mantric lemon' is also operated in the same way, says Sakhare. It is flung in the direction of the enemy's house, where it hovers like a "ball of fire", striking the victim on the chest, the moment he steps out. The victim vomits blood and promptly dies. "The strange part of it is that nobody but the victim himself can spot the lemon, but by then it is too late for him to take cover, for it dives down at an astonishing speed." Mooth has been explained as the black magician's projection of his evil force—whipped up by extreme hate for the intended victim—in an object, which is generally a lump of rice, millet, or a lemon. The strike-force of this fistful of hate is believed to be tremendous, because of the potent mantras fed into it.

A famous case of mooth was that of a young music maestro, who after his appointment as court singer in the former Baroda state is said to have been the victim of both poisoning and mooth. His life was saved by a learned man with whom he was living, but his tanpura was shattered to bits and, according to the court grapevine, he continued to suffer the evil effects of black magic for several years thereafter.

It is also believed that if a black magician's evil power is not strong enough to accomplish his purpose, it will rebound and kill him instead. A case in point is the one reported in a Bom-

bay weekly. Swami, a devout worshipper of Lord Muruga, got involved in litigation with his uncle. They were both claimants to the same property. His uncle is said to have practised black magic, with the result that Swami collapsed of a dizzy spell one morning. When he came around, four of his upper teeth were missing, as though an invisible fist had given him a blow. Swami prayed desperately to his deity for protection. He survived. Exactly a year later, says the report, punctually on the same day and time as his loss of teeth, his perfectly healthy uncle died mysteriously.[1]

Foetus Snatchers

A gory practice amongst black magicians in Maharashtra, as well as in Kerala, has to do with the ripping out of the foetus of a woman who has died during pregnancy. The foetus is roasted while muttering special mantras—till it turns black and moist like *kajal*. It is then sold in attractive little boxes.

The stuff is supposed to be potent enough to drive people mad, if surreptitiously fed to them. Women allegedly use it for the purpose of attracting and controlling the opposite sex. When mixing it in food, one has to be cautious of the quantity, for it is supposed to have an unpleasant taste. Supari, banana, tea or coffee are believed to disguise it best. It is said that as soon as it enters the stomach, the black magician is in immediate control of the victim. It is believed that the charred flesh, once swallowed, starts 'growing and sprouting hair'. Unlike other undigested matter, however, it cannot be expelled by the body. A special herb mixed with milk is said to be its antidote.

A senior bank officer in Bombay, who claimed to have witnessed the whole messy process said: "The child of a good friend at Matunga had been behaving strangely for a few days. A Keralite pujari from Ghatkopar examined him and declared that the boy was being controlled by a black magician. The boy was fed herb paste and he vomited. I saw chunks of flesh, though not yet at the hair-growing stage. The eerie part of it was that when the bile dried, the lumps shrivelled, but bloated again as soon as water was poured on them. Ugh! They were like hide-

ous parasites! I was never a believer in witchcraft till I experienced this!" he concluded, with a shudder.

The possibility that the herbal paste itself was mistaken for lumps of flesh never occured to the officer. A strong belief in witchcraft (despite protestations to the contrary) existed in him, though maybe in the subconscious, for the gentleman came from a community of believers. This, combined with strong suggestions by the pujari, an individual highly respected in the South, whose word is often law, made him see the herbal concoction as a "bloating parasite."

If suggestions can be strong enough to make people hallucinate, the act of feeding the child the herbal paste must have enhanced the credibility of the black magic story spun by the pujari. Superstition is the foundation over which the priests build their superstructure of power and control over people.

Controlling a human being through food is distinctly different from the more common belief in controlling them by means of an 'outside force' — a spirit trained to do the magician's bidding. More cases of control through the gastro-intestinal system (mantra-filled edibles, etc.) are discussed later.

4 Metamorphosing Witches

Oddiyans

Foetuses and their dubious uses in black rituals bring us to the infamous *oddiyan* phenomenon of Kerala, which was deeply feared at one time.

'Oddiyan' is a word that has been fearfully whispered down generations of Malayalees — no matter what their class or status. Though it does not today have the stranglehold of Kuttichathan, a potentially evil spirit, those (generally of the older generation) who unwaveringly believe in the phenomenon have at least one close encounter with the 'thing' to recount. (Keralites are a very hospitable people, I discovered, who believe in regaling their guests with hair-raising anecdotes over a sumptous Malayalee meal!)

Oddiyans were, apparently, members of a tribe that excelled in witchcraft. In the days when villages were still without electricity and surrounded by impregnable forests, no pregnant women dared venture out alone into the night. If any unfortunate woman was foolish enough to do so, even if only to visit the toilet, which was generally built a small distance from the house, she would invariably be pounced upon by oddiyans on the prowl — who would gag her, drag her off to a secluded spot, rip out her foetus and, if it was a male, make off with it. In case it was female, the foetus would be unceremoniously thrown into the bushes. In either case, the gasping woman was left to bleed to death. "It was not unusual, those days, to stumble across a mangled female corpse at dawn," says Shangooman, a 75-year old Nair working for a family in Ernakulam, Cochin.

The Oddiyans were a fussy tribe and insisted not only that

the foetus be male, but also that it should belong to a woman pregnant for the first time. Apparently, this bloodthirsty lot made a potion of the foetus, by mixing it with special herbs and leaves. The mixture, when applied to their limb joints, was said to transform them into animals. However, some people felt that somehow, with the help of the potion, the oddiyans merely hypnotized their victims into believing that they had changed their physical form.

In its animal form, an oddiyan prowled about looking for victims. It waylaid passers-by and harassed them into hurling stones or abuse at it. This 'insult' provided an excuse to commit murder. No sooner was the pebble thrown or a curse muttered, than the oddiyan resumed his human form and strangled the victim. Interestingly, a second century Greek manuscript *The Golden Ass*, recounts a similar Greek belief in metamorphosing witches who changed into animal form to carry out their ghoulish activities.

Shangooman once had an interesting oddiyan 'experience'. It happened when he was a youth. While crossing the fields in Trichur on an errand one day, a rather querulous dog began snapping at his ankles. He was about to throw a stone at it, when he noticed a deformity in its ears. Now, it is believed that an oddiyan's transformation into an animal is incomplete, in that it always has some physical defect. Realization dawned on Shangooman who ran for his life. Suddenly, boulders appeared out of nowhere and began trundling towards him. Picking his way gingerly through them, he tried in vain to shake the creature off his trail. He managed to reach his house and bolted the door from inside.

The occupants of the house, highly educated land-owners of Trichur, vouch for the incident and claim to have heard "blows on the door as though an enraged person was hurling himself at it". They also claim to have heard the "familiar, wild, animal like cry" of the oddiyan. Nobody had the courage to investigate.

Oddiyans still exist, insist some authorities on the occult. But they have been pushed into pockets in Kerala after their persecution by the police. "Maybe they don't operate openly, but they

certainly do so on the sly," declares Dr. N., a Malayalee who claims to have earned a doctorate in astrology. He also claims to have witnessed oddiyan activities in Kerala. Others believe that oddiyans have quietly retreated to the Western ghats, where they are as curse-happy as ever.

Incidentally, North-East India, particularly Bihar, has a similar belief in witches who can metamorphose themselves into animals. Locally, they are known as the *Candar Bandar*. The tribals there believe that the tiger is not a man eater, but it is men, temporarily changed into tigers, who attack and devour humans. The concept of metamorphosis may be an imaginative manifestation of the primitive's awareness of the basic oneness of life. Humans were not far removed from animals, he observed. The impulses were similar; the only exception was human intelligence, which was definitely superior.

Another legend associating black magic with pregnant women, is that of the *hadal*, the spirit of a woman dead in childbirth. The hadal is a phenomenon peculiar to Maharashtra and she is sought by black magicians, for their own purposes. The person in search of the hadal is asked by his guru to identify those who carried the dead woman's corpse to the cremation ground. The earth stepped on by the two bier-bearers in the rear is collected in a tin-box. The earth constitutes one of the prayer materials used in invoking the hadal. The next day, the initiate goes to the particular cremation ground and squats naked on the ground. He burns incense and repeats the incantations taught by his guru. The hadal is, in this way, subjugated and does anything the black magician wants it to do.

Again oddly similar to the Maharashtrian belief is the one prevalent in Bihar. Women who die in childbirth are believed to be evil *bongas* (spirits). Also, those who meet with a violent death are known as the Ikir bongas — believed to be spirits of the deep waters and willing slaves of wizards and witches.

Yakshi Legend

A near equivalent of the hadal is the *yakshi* of Kerala — the *chureil* or vampire as she is known in north India. The diffe-

rence between the hadal and the yakshi is that the yakshi is not the spirit of a human being but is supposed to be a ghoul, fearsome to behold, that is revitalized through potent mantras by a black magician. The unholy rituals to control the yakshi are said to be carried out at a cemetry. The yakshi sometimes works on her own — without being conjured up by a sorcerer. She lures men to their death by assuming the form of a devastatingly beautiful woman.

In a well-known legend, now a part of Kerala's folklore, a yakshi was said to have pursued a great grandfather of the present Kallur Nambudiripad. The Nambudiri ancestor was then in his prime. On his way to the temple one day, he noticed a woman following him at a respectable distance. She was carrying a baby in her arms. The beauty of the woman struck him as unearthly. What made him uneasier still was her silken soft voice calling out to him seductively. "How does she know my name?" he wondered, as he quickened his pace. Instinct told him not to stop, but to reach the temple as soon as possible.

En route he made a detour and visited his guru, who had gone to one of the bigger temples of the area for his morning ablutions. The woman had also quickened her pace so as not to lose sight of him. She now seemed keen to halt his progress, for she began calling him urgently by his given name. The young Nambudiri reached his guru and tremulously pointed out the lady, who hovered near the door of the temple as though she dared not step into its inner sanctum. The experienced guru needed no explanation. "She is a yakshi," he said with frightening finality, "there's no mistake about that. Run to the nearest Durga temple and as you enter it, throw this red cloth that I am giving you over the Durga image. You will be safe then. But you must reach the temple before she catches up with you, for she knows your intention and will try her best to kill you before you accomplish that."

The trembling young man took the cloth and raced out of the temple. The yakshi ceased calling out to him and instead began pursuing him with grim determination. She was practically breathing down his neck when he reached the temple and thrust

his foot in. This signified his having entered the sacred compound, and the yakshi was again forced to halt. The moment he stepped in, he threw the red cloth around the shoulders of the Durga idol, which, it is popularly believed, came to life. At the sight of her devotee in trouble, Durga brandished her sword, pursued the yakshi into the forest and slew her. To cleanse herself of the yakshi's blood, the goddess is said to have had a bath in one of the forest ponds.

I have visited the pond, which is near the Chottanikara temple in Ernakulam. The water, which was said to be clear in those days, now has a red turbidity about it. Devotees attribute it to the blood of the yakshi which spread itself on the surface. And though the pond's old-world quaintness apparently lends credibility to the tale, it is only algae and pollutants that have spread over the water's surface through the decades. The pond is unclean, yet devotees drink its unhygienic water and wash themselves in it, in the hope of being cured of spirits and diseases—probably contracting more diseases than they hope to be rid of.[1]

5 Black Magic and the Hindu Scriptures

The Atharvaveda—one of the oldest and most sacred books of the Hindus—is a 'mantric' veda. It contains very powerful mantras, that can be used for good or for evil, says Kallur Namboodiripad, "They are like honey, which if taken in moderate quantities is healthy, but if mixed with water is poisonous."

Interestingly, there is an American Indian legend which also ascribes poisonous properties to honey. According to Prof. Levi-Strauss, who has done considerable research into American Indian beliefs, a mythological baby-eating frog was believed by the Indians to have died after having a feast of honey. "Honey," he writes, "is an exquisite food on the border-line of poison." This has not been verified, but he did explain that certain types of honey, like wasp's honey, are poisonous. Nambudiripad, in this context, is probably referring unwittingly to a certain type of honey, though he seems to have made a general statement about all kinds of honey, which, if mixed with water, become poisonous. It has not been verified whether diluted honey can be bad for health. In this case, however, he is drawing an anology. Mantras with evil intentions lose their purity, like honey mixed with water. A man intending harm reads these mantras, while mentally concentrating on the evil he intends to do, or he may even read the mantras backwards. The effect would then be that of the Brahmastra, or a 'mantric arrow' that will aim at and kill an enemy. "Take for instance, the *gayatri mantra*. It is said to be one of the most powerful Vedic mantras. It has to be pronounced perfectly — *'Om, bhoor, bhuvah-swaha, tat savitar vare niyam, bhargo devasya dhee mahee, diyo yo*

naam, pracho dayad' in perfect order. — Distorted vibrations can cause harm."

The proper pronunciation of the gayatri mantra, it is believed, produces certain vibrations that in turn produce a powerful sense of well-being in a person. In mispronuncing it, the same vibrations can assume a destructive quality and can, physically as well as mentally, damage a person, who may either be an innocent chanter of the mantra or the person at whom these vibrations are aimed by a trained mantravadi.

It is said that Mantras which are mastered by a mantravadi, can kill an enemy even at a distance, and 'return' to the mantravadi. Such a mantra is known as *dhanurvedam* — or the mantra with the bow and arrow effect — *dhanur* standing for bow and *vedam* for mantra. Kshatriyas or warriors are said to have made use of it in antiquity. This is a typical example of primitive behaviour, which survives to this day, in which mantras are treated as verbal arrows that are symbolically aimed at the enemy's heart. The principle of similarity is in action here, where the magician, while performing the act of aiming a symbolic mantric weapon at the victim, prays that the victim may similarly be struck down by the deity. The magician here realizes that the act by itself is not going to have any effect on the victim. So he throws in a prayer (incorporated in the mantric arrow) requesting the god to do that on his behalf. The action itself of aiming the dhanurvedam is more an explanation to the god of what he (the magician) wants done.

The late James George Frazer, the eminent anthropologist, committed the initial mistake of presuming that savages and primitives believed some telepathic principle to be involved--that, by the principle of similarity (another name for which is homeopathic magic) the savage or primitive believed that whatever action he performed would have a concurrent reaction on the victim, by way of conveying that act telepathically to the receiver. For example. the action of stabbing a rag doll with pins, believed Frazer, would convince the primitive magician of similar repercussions on the person of the man represented by the doll.

Contemporary anthropologists, however, by use of finer techniques and the greater investigation, have discovered that primitives never believed in the power of their own magical ceremonies or incantations. They elaborately performed a ritual to inform the deity of exactly what they wanted him or her to do. Along with the action was included—and this is important—a prayer by which the supplicant attempted to 'move' the deity to action. This holds true for the mantra-weapon ceremony employed in the Malabar. A dhanurvedam is nothing but an entreaty to the deity to do the needful in a particular way.

The vedas are considered stepping stones to 'supernatural' powers, and from there to the highest goal of self-realization. Those who recorded them thousands of years ago, intended them to be used for the good of humanity, but of course, if a knowledgeable man uses them for evil, the scholarly Hindus believe "he shall reap what he sows". The Hindu philosophy of *Karma* —central to Hindu religion—emerges here.

The vedas, like the gods and goddesses, are basically amoral. If a mantric decides to use mantra power for controlling human lives, he does it on his own responsibility. Ultimately, it is believed, he will have to reap the results of his *Karma.*

This, in reality, is the Hindu philosophy of cause and effect. That is why, perhaps, Hindu mantras and Tantra are regarded with suspicion by those lacking knowledge of them.

This logic is also applied to the worship of Kali, the goddess of destruction and an incarnation of Durga. Sakhare was vehement that Kali was not the black magician's deity, but according to the Tantric scriptures, Kali blesses all those who worship her. If a man uses the powers bestowed by her for evil, it is at his own peril.

This is again reminiscent of the dual nature of divinity, seen not only in Hindu religion but Islam too. The greatest difference between the two is that while deities reign supreme in Hindu forms of magic, Quranic incantations are all-important in Islam.

6 Instruments and Practices

Human flesh is often a crucial ingredient in the mind-boggling, power-seeking rites of the occult. Let us step down from scriptural sanction to the world of 'active' or practical magic. Here too, the notion of similarity appears.

"Like ought to produce like" is the primitive logic, which manifests itself in ceremonies involving corpses and parts of the human body. For purposes of greater clarification, ceremonies using parts of a human body, or articles once belonging to a person and now separated from him, belong to the category of "contagious" magic. Here, the use of a part of the body in a particular manner was believed by the primitive magician to affect the victim in similar fashion. Also coined by Frazer, the term "contagious magic" like homeopathic magic or laws of similarity, has today been redefined as a ceremony that is accompanied by an entreaty to the deity concerned. The only difference between the two types of magic is that magic based on similarity is performed directly often with incantations and without 'mediums' such as the articles mentioned under contagious magic.

The burning, roasting or burying of a human part will not automatically take effect on the person concerned. Communities practising this do not believe it any more than they believe that they can control nature. What is added to these complicated rites that initially deceived the most astute observers, is an express invocation of superior beings, who, believed primitives, could be moved into action by prayers. The rites were merely symbolic and as I have mentioned earlier, they were enacted for the god's benefit (obviously a fallible god, who needs to be shown things) so that he would understand what exactly they wanted

from him—and then would carry out their wishes. These were rites in which the object desired was simulated in advance.

At the primitive stage of thought, the qualities and potential of an object were not attributed to its 'organizational structure' (as by modern science) but to the properties and 'influences' conferred on it on separate occasions. Such properties are generally 'borrowed' from one object or person and transferred to another, to meet a special demand. A penis severed from a corpse may not have the property necessary to turn a man into a lusty brute, but when the wish arises to curse a man into sexual savagery, the act of heating such a penis to the point of roasting it presents itself to the primitive mind as a source from which the 'heat' and hence the sexual urge, may be 'borrowed'. There is no question of telepathic or homeopathic magic here. It is more or less a 'wish' enacted—a symbolic consummation of a deed desired. Given below are a few examples.

The left forearm of a woman who has died in childbirth is said to be often used as a 'magical' wand. It is believed that this wand can put anyone to sleep so that the rogue of a black magician can have intercourse with her, and later make off with her belongings.

It is imperative that the arm, in order to have magical properties, be that of a woman killed at childbirth. This may be due to primitive reasoning that the arm of a pregnant woman will have natural soporific properties, since during the advanced stages of pregnancy, a woman becomes comparatively lethargic. Hence, it is hoped, a similar effect will be produced on someone touched by the arm.

Incidentally, voodooists are also known to use parts of the human body for purposes of black magic. Rivers, a 33-year-old Black, was arrested in 1954 for having chopped off the head, left forearm and right hand of a corpse. The alcohol he immersed them in was applied to his forehead, left forearm and right hand. This, according to belief, enabled him to practise voodoo, but it also rendered him liable to prosecution.

Mohammed Yusuf, a plump, 42-year-old 'miracle man' from Kurla, Bombay, said to have a following amongst film folk, feels

that human flesh is useful only if the spirit of the corpse is still earthbound. "Generally, the spirit of a cremated body hovers around it much longer than that of a buried corpse. That may be the reason why Hindu witchcraft is a more potent than that indulged in by any other community," continued Yusuf. "Their cremation grounds abound in spirits, Muslims on the other hand, bury the soul with the corpse and so there is less chance of capturing a spirit. A Hindu tribe in Kerala also buries its dead —perhaps because of the fear of wandering spirits."

This kind of reasoning was also prevalent among the ancient Egyptians, who believed that the soul of a corpse stayed within the body till it disintegrated. In fact, this was apparently the reason why they began embalming the bodies—so that the soul within could never escape—keeping the body 'alive' in a symbolic sense. A body that is cremated is believed automatically to release its soul—this is a universal belief—not belonging to any particular community.

Part of a body, roasted slowly over a fire, with the appropriate spells, can torture the victim of a black magician's wrath, Yusuf disclosed. The part of the victim affected is the same as that of the corpse. For example, roasting a brain can drive the live victim mad, steaming a heart will control the victim's own, and in the case of a crotch, penis, or pubic hair, the victim will be driven sex-crazy!

During a cremation, chanting mantras over the still-warm corpse is said to make a slave of its spirit. If water is poured on the ashes, however, the spirit is said to be 'liberated'.

Planting a human hair in someone's food, with evil intent, is considered effective. But it does not mean enslaving a spirit, which basically requires mantric acrobatics at cemeteries and cremation grounds. This business of hair recalls an amusing case recounted by Yusuf, also known as 'Babaji' or 'Munshiji', by his followers.

A distraught Punjabi woman once complained to him that her daughter-in-law was gradually driving a wedge between her and her son. On intuition, Munshiji asked her to bring any image of a god that she might possess. The mother had a Shiva image

at home—which she brought the following morning. Yusuf cut out the bottom of the statue and out tumbled a ball of pubic hair. Munshiji replaced that with cow's hair, sealed the opening and returned the image. Since the cow is considered sacred by Hindus, he knew that the substitute hair could not harm anyone. He then bottled the pubic hair and kept it in his earthen stove.[1]

The culprit turned out to be a tantric, who, at the request of the jealous daughter-in-law, had cast a spell that was meant to separate mother and son. After Munshiji's delicate 'operation', the tantric suddenly developed a burning urinary infection. In fact, as the temperature in the bottle rose, the Tantric's discomfort increased. Suspecting foul play he got hold of the statute and broke open its false bottom. The cow's hair was discovered by the infuriated tantric.

Munshiji, deciding that the culprit had had his punishment, put the smoking bottle in water. The hair began to cool and the harassed tantric felt immediate relief. The man had a foul temper and swore revenge on the culprit—after he had discovered him. But Munshiji was too shrewd for him, and the raging tantric had to go home without his quarry. The errant son, of course was reunited with the mother and the bewildered daughter-in-law could not fathom what had gone wrong with the 'foolproof' plan.

A garlanded photograph of Munshiji soon found pride of place along with the family deity. In response to puzzled enquiries, the wily mother would reply, "This man? Oh, he's our business partner—a highly qualified and respectable man." The real reason for her adoration remained a carefully protected secret.

Human Sacrifice

The human head, in particular the skull, is also considered very potent for acquiring powers. In Africa, too, the use of human skulls for purposes of magic is considered important. Human heads are boiled and the bony part skilfully removed from the shrunken flesh—which then looks like a large and rather unappetising orange. These 'heads' are suspended from the doorway

or strung up. They are believed to ward off evil. Whereas very primitive tribes of the West Coast of India are purported to indulge in a similar practice, most wizards and black magicians make more use of the human skull. Children are lured to lonely places and beheaded—the head often buried—to propitiate a bloodthirsty deity.

Sometimes murders are resorted to in the name of witchcraft, either because of a desire for personal vengeance or power, or because of commonplace superstitions which advocate human sacrifice for purposes such as saving a village embankment from flood water. According to a newspaper report, this happened in a village in Madhya Pradesh, when a 22-year-old woman was murdered (except that it was considered a sacrifice) to save the village from the fury of the river. The infamous Manwat murders of Maharashtra are example of what is also happening in remote corners of the West coast. Human sacrifice is not uncommon in India—in fact it is an integral part of witchcraft ceremonies all over the world.

The use of blood, along with sex, is considered a potent means of gaining paranormal powers. Blood splashed over a deity in supplication was and is believed to propitiate it into acceding to the supplicator's request. What makes blood special is its life sustaining property. According to the primitive mind, the greatest gift that man could make to the gods in return for favours was that of life-supporting 'material', like food and blood. Sex is also immensely important, as it is the creator of life. In the 'left-handed path' of tantra, the practitioners of which often take to sorcery, the sexual act is performed while mentally visualizing the union of Shiva with Shakti, his spouse. The fertility aspect of sex is epitomized in semen, which is retained by the male partner even at the height of sexual passion—the retention (as opposed to 'wasteful' ejaculation) signifying its role in procreation and in perpetuating the human race.

The importance attached to semen in rituals is also reflected in the worship by women of the penis (*lingam*), as the conveyor of that life-giving force to the womb. The worship of the *Shivalinga* (Shiva's divine organ) is a concrete example of

linga worship. Other sex and fertility-related black magic rites also use menstrual blood. Since survival and procreation are the two most important functions underlying existence, all magic, including that which is practised in the West Coast, is geared basically to serving this primitive and very basic human motive.

Karnataka's Peculiarity

During black magic rituals, Kali and Durga are worshipped in Karnataka, although indirectly. The deity is given the name of Sakini or Dakini and is worshipped with incantations, wine and meat in a lonely spot—preferably in a jungle or a cemetery. Standing in water, chanting the *devi* or, beejamantras in the colloqial language till dawn, is one of the prescribed rituals.

Most deities sponsoring witchcraft activities are different aspects of the major Hindu gods and goddesses, such as Parvati, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha and their offspring. This is also true of Hindu religion, where one god is worshipped under different names in various parts of the country. The logic behind this is simple. When man created god in his own image, he invested him with human attributes, which were sublimated in the god. Man personified each one of these attributes in the form of a separate deity, all tracing their roots back to the one god, and worshipped each deity hoping, in this way, to acquire power in that particular sphere. Hence, Lakshmi, the goddess of riches (deity of wealthy families) was worshipped for the sake of improving business, causing a windfall or any other form of acquiring wealth. Saraswati, the patroness of art and culture, was worshipped to acquire proficiency in the arts, and Shiva, the macho personification of the forces of procreation, was petitioned for a child, preferably a son. The destructive aspect of the divine personality—like the seamy side of human nature—was tapped by the unscrupulous, for death-dealing and other destructive purposes. Hence the worship of Sakini and Dakini (the 'blacker' aspect of Shakti, Shiva's wife, also known as Kali and Durga) amongst the sorcerers of Karnataka.

Spiritual strength has generally been considered a feminine attribute by the Hindus, whether it is an embodiment of love

and compassion (Amba, Lakshmi Durga) or the dispassionate dispenser of justice (Kali, Shakti). This is the reason why devi worship is popular amongst both black and white magicians.

In Karnataka, deities with the curious names Shakini; Dakini, and Lakini are worshipped for purposes of witchcraft and black magic. The mantra, *Om Kleem Shakini Namah/Swaha*—is supposed to impel the particular deity to smite someone with love or lust.

Karnataka has adopted its own brand of Tantric and other forms of black magic. Some of the common effects of witchcraft are said to be a sudden lack of concentration in ones work, an illness that is impossible to diagnose, friends who become inimical, worms appearing in ones food and a state of *buddhisthambham* or physical immobility, where one is rooted to a spot.

The worship of *kshudradevatas* (demon-gods) and *pretas* (spirits) is believed to infuse a black magician with incredible occult powers. Pretas are believed to take birth over and over again as flesh and blood creatures (ref. the Hindu belief in reincarnation). But in the event of any one of these souls not having taken birth and having remained carthbound, certain potent mantras are said to be enough to enslave them. Mantrics (practising magicians) are believed to capture these pretas and get their earthly tasks performed by them.

Ashada-amavasya, or the last day of the fourth month of the Hindu calendar is considered ideal for capturing spirits. On this day, appropriate mantras gleaned from ones guru are chanted. Those following the very basic vamacharya, or lefthanded path of Tantra, follow this ritual. To control a spirit, the Vamachari has to plough through the required four 'M's: *Matsya, Mansa, Madya* and *Maithuna* (explained in the chapter on Tantra).

These tantric activities are comparatively less prevalent in Karnataka than in Kerala. In North Karnataka, the non Tantric sorcerers chant the names of the pretas or *pisachas* (ghosts) under their breath. Then with the appropriate rituals, a hen or a cock is butchered. The Tantric procedure of attempting

to raise the Kundalini is also followed by them. Apparently, there is also a non-tantric method of controlling spirits for black-magic purposes in Karnataka. This method supposedly helps a wizard succeed in gaining power without raising his Kundalini, or even going through the scriptural formalities of Tantra. The rustic black magician chooses a pond, stands hip-deep in it at midnight (a form of propitiatory penance) and chants *guru* mantras 1008 times (the number has occult significance for Hindus like the Islamic 786). keeping the image of the kshudradevata. or the pisacha that he is propitiating, in mind. He then returns, before dawn. This continues for 48 days—with the black magician spending one hour in the morning and one in the evening for ritualistic worship. Sometimes Kali is the goddess worshipped.

Another ritual known as the *Bhanamati*, involves a rag doll peppered with pins. In this acupuncture-like operation, pins are driven into the doll's joints, with the magician concentrating on *Mantrochharya* or the frequent repeating of mantras. A man with good concentration is believed to achieve in three days what others do in 48 days. The image is given a name—perhaps that of the victim, and then it is thrown inside the victim's house, may be his terrace, garden or anywhere in the vicinity. Some also bury it. This ritual is also practised in north and east India, as well as by European gypsies. It perhaps arrived there from Central Asia as part of the mystical rites of the Aryans who, when they spread to Europe and the rest of Asia, took their culture with them. That seems to be the only explanation of the relative universality of this peculiar ritual. Yet there is evidence for its existence in the Dravidian dominated region of South India, before the Aryan invasions. This can be attributed to the similarity of human thought-processes.

One of the pisachas in Karnataka is popularly known as the *karna* pisacha. It is an invisible spirit, that is only heard but not seen (karna stands for ear). It is believed to impart all information to a black magician in control of it. Its presence is said to cause a curious 'mental vibration' in a man, its movement causes an inexplicable disturbance in the atmosphere and

it has 'itchy' feet, for it keeps moving. Animals are said to be specially sensitive to its presence. But materialize it will not. Not even before the wiliest of black magicians!

The various spirits are said to be propitiated by the Kannadiga black magician also by means of erecting a stone, imbuing it with the personality of the particular pisacha and by chanting beejamantras before it. He worships the stone with kum kum *haldi* (turmeric), red flowers and at certain stages, offers wine to the stone and drinks it himself as part of the ritual.[2]

He is subsequently thought to be blessed with the powers of the practised vamachari tantric—all within 48 days. Sometimes it takes double that time, almost 96 days, at the end of which the unlettered black magician may be able to acquire any of the three *siddhis* (miraculous powers) mentioned in our chapter on tantra. These steps are considered essential; the ultimate test as to whether the black magician has really acquired powers, comes later.

One of the goddesses worshipped by the non-tantric sorcerers is Manamma—a good spirit which is believed to have risen above the cycle of birth and death and hence is worshipped as a devi. She is generally worshipped for purposes of 'white' magic as healing the sick, manipulating the weather, etc.

Now for some word-of-mouth histories. Bhadraiah, a native of a village near Bangalore, desired beautiful Rukmini, who was already married. He would chant mantras pertaining to *vashikarana* (hypnosis), which sounded suspiciously like "Vashya.... vashya.....vashya" and she would be drawn towards his house. Her in-laws would in desperation lock her up, but she would begin behaving like a savage. A lot of mantrics gave up her case.

At last a shastri, a devout worshipper of Ganapati, tried his luck. He chanted mantras which totally shattered Bhadraiah's spell. He also tied a taweez (a talisman said to neutralize the effect of evil) on the girl's wrist, and she came back to normal. And for 20 years now, she has been living the life of a normal Kannadiga housewife. Bhadraiah acknowledged his defeat and left the woman alone after that.

A washerwoman of another village declared that she was suffering from a kind of trouble she could not explain. She stopped working, eating and even talking after a while and rejected all medicines. The family members suspected witchcraft. A mantric was called. He applied *anjan* to his palm and announced that something was hovering on the threshold of the house. He muttered some mantras and the 'vision' disappeared. Some more rituals and ablutions were carried out and the woman was cured. This was a case of divination.

Black magicians in Karnataka also believe in capturing pretas near corpses in a cemetery. This contradicts Mohammed Yusuf's statement that spirits are generally found in cremation-grounds. These Hindu-spirit trappers obviously considered cemeteries (generally those where Muslims and Christians are buried) as ideal hunting grounds. The spirits are more easily captured, it is believed, when the body has been dead for not longer than 10 to 12 days, or maybe a month, and the spirit is still hovering near it, before entering a higher plane of existence. At that time, it is still pregnant with memories of its earthly life and probably still has some unfulfilled desires left. (This is also the reason why some spirits are believed to be permanently earth-bound and hence easier to capture.) The black magician entices the spirit through propitiating mantras and with wine and flowers for 48 days. On an *amavasya* (moonless) day the mantras are chanted 1008 times—one hour in the morning and one in the evening. The flowers are red, symbolizing blood, and an animal is sacrificed over the grave. In case the preta is still hovering, he is brought under control and will fulfil the desires of the black magician. The task completed, after 48 days the black magician will summon the preta again and make its acquaintance. At this point, there is said to be a curious disturbance in the air, and a chill breeze begins to blow.

Necromancers, or those claiming to communicate with the dead for the purpose of ascertaining the future, also participate in repellent cemetery rites. They exhume a corpse a few days after it is buried (it cannot be too long, since the body decomposes), pour *sarayi* or *henda* (country wine) into its mouth and then propitiate its spirit with flowers. The hair, a nail or some other

part of the body is also pulled out and kept by the necromancer—this helps him to continue being in touch with the corpse's 'preta'. As explained before, the nails and hair of a person (whether dead or living) are closely guarded by the black magician. For the necromancer, too, the nail or hair assumes the identity of the owner, and can be used to summon his spirit, with the help of propitiating mantras. This is known as 'preta vidya' or necromancy.

Typical examples of the nature of witchcraft or exorcism in Karnataka are epitomized in the two following experiences:

A possessed man was reputed to have been made unconscious by a Brahmin and laid in a grave along with a live chicken, in order to free him of a spell. In the morning the chicken was dead and the man had disappeared. This was one of the known 'magic' cures in that part of Karnataka. This is nothing but the logic of making a surrogate for trouble out of a living creature, which can 'carry away' a sickness, or perish because of it (like the hen in this case), so that the ailing person may be cured. It is a transference of evil—the shifting of man's pains and burdens to another just like "shifting of wood or stones, from one back to another".

The second case was that of a girl who, obsessed with a 25-year-old boy, committed suicide because of unrequired love Her spirit knocked at his door every night. When the door was opened. the person was met with nothing more than a gust of wind. An exorcist instructed the young man to open the door himself the next time. He did and suddenly the girl materialized. Hyptonized, he responded to her seductive beckoning, and walked out into the night, with her.

The boy returned home safe after his 'rendezvous', but the next time this happened, the shrewd exorcist performed some rituals and threw a lemon at the boy, who, with the impact, regained his senses and scampered into the house. From that day the spirit was neither seen nor heard of again. The boy did not remember anything. The incident is reputed to have taken place near Kolar district about 64 km from Bangalore.

The mantrics who undo spells in Karnataka, generally use the method of applying kajal to a plate and gauging the trouble done, with the help of mantras. They then 'supply' the remedies.

Incidentally, a male 'witch' in Karnataka is called a *matagara* and a female, a *matagathi*.

7 Local Forms of Magic

Ritual baths, visits to the cemetery—these ceremonies are offshoots of an archaic form of Tantra, dating back to a more primitive religion than that of the Aryans—that of the ancient Dravidians. A present day illustration is the case of the black magician who built a clay image of the person he intended to harm. He engraved the name of the victim on the image and then stabbed it with seven pointed sticks made from newly cut stalks, muttering, as he let fly each one, "Destroyed be—(the name of the person), the son of—(the name of the victim's father)."

Slain animals and birds, clay images of the intended victim or an 'enchanted' lemon are burnt, roasted, buried, pricked or, as above, stabbed with a sharp instrument. The practices, believed to bring about a corresponding pain, sickness or even death in the victim, are indulged in by the inferior tantrics, who are not well-versed in the rituals of scriptural Tantra, but only 'localize' them. A doll made of dough and smeared with something belonging to the intended victim, such as menstrual blood, excrement, semen, hair, nails, saliva or even a piece of cloth, is said to bestow on the practitioner extraordinary powers which he or she invariably exorcizes to subjugate an opponent. Here, again, as mentioned in the case of the Vedic chants, the magician undertakes elaborate rituals, involving a personal possession of the victim, in the hope of 'showing' the deity what exactly he wants done. The hair, nails, saliva, excrement and menstrual blood mentioned above are used either to identify the victim to the spirit or deity, or simply as indicators of the body area he wants harmed. For example using a hair or the saliva of a person could mean a curse aimed at destroying the victim's hair or, in the second case, producing painful boils in the mouth.[1]

The paraphernalia generally required by a black magician during rituals is a sacrificial knife, a wand (preferably made from a human thigh bone), a cauldron, a pestle and mortar, earthen lamps, a cup, copper trays in which to burn herbs, a 'magic' mirror or crystal, an astrolabe, books, on the art of witchcraft and appropriate robes, often of human bones strung together, if the practitioner is a tantric. To have the maximum effect, all the paraphernalia must be made of virgin materials, because occult practitioners believe that if they have been used before, the user's aura will affect them and produce dangerous side-effects.

A human skull is used too and if the black magician is also an alchemist, he needs an althanor—a furnace, in the shape of a *yoni* (vagina). (A yoni, like the lingam, is an important in fertility rites, because of its part in the act of procreation.) A satanist uses black candles made, preferably of human fat from butchered children—if not, then of fat from slaughtered pigs, dogs, owls, vultures or cats. The candles are black in contrast to the white of the Church altar candles and they are made of fat because flesh signifies the anthithesis of Christianity which preaches purity; the orthodox sections of Christianity even frown upon the more natural functions of flesh such as sex. Butchered flesh also implies murder, pain and agony, again the antithesis of Christianity, with its emphasis on love, life and contentment.

However, the satanist's materials are hardly in vogue in Malabar or the surrounding regions, where even the Christian black-rites are Hinduized and the traditional black mass is a rarity. The candles are generally used for a 'black mass'—which is a perverse parody of the church mass, and is performed among witches in Europe, according to sporadic newspaper accounts and authorities on the occult such as Colin Wilson.

Fertility Spells

Human bones are considered potent in cursing, causing sickness or even killing a fellow human. Blowing powdered bones in the direction of the victim's house, with the accompanying curse, is believed to be very effective. Bone powder is also used in

concocting potions either to prolong life or to cause death. An ancient Indian ritual to impregnate women also makes use of the stuff. According to it, the corpse of a man should be removed to a quiet spot, it should be washed, purified and placed within a pentacle or circle (chakra) with "the radius equal to seven hands of the woman".

The circle must be drawn by the woman herself. The corpse has to be burnt in her presence alone at night, and when nothing but bones and ashes are left, she must strip the lower part of her body and squat with legs wide open, within the circle, facing the moon. "Then she must lie down," continues the text, "exposing her yoni and asking the devil to appear. Whereupon, the wind will arise and blow the ashes of the dead man around her body and she will conceive from them. Such a child when grown up will become the leader"—obviously of a tribe of black magicians. The male dominates here too. True to the values of a society where man has long been considered superior to a woman, a male corpse, even though cremated and reduced to ashes is still considered potent enough to successfully procreate. while a woman's corpse is sexually abused by a magician to enhance his own power, but it has no reproductive powers of its own.[2]

The 'magic circle' has great significance in the occult—more specially in south India. In early times, a circle of black pebbles was used by magicians to safeguard a woman at childbirth from demons. The episode in the *Ramayana* of Lakshmana drawing a line or *rekha* to protect Sita, before he sets out to look for Rama, and Ravana's subsequent reluctance to step into it, is an ideal example of the powers ascribed to it. The circle is considered a 'boundary' within which no devil is likely to enter. The magical circle is a universal phenomenon and is used by Christians (the 'pentacle') and Muslims too (discussed later).

Another Indian fertility spell involves the collecting and swallowing of spider's webs in the company of ones husband, when the moon is waxing. If that is repugnant, then water containing the husband's saliva, or alternatively, a glowing piece of

charcoal, may be swallowed, thereby acquiring the help of Agni, the Hindu god of fire—Agni as fire is worshipped in marriage ceremonies and many fertility rites. Fieriness of spirit is attributed to fire, so is purity (by virtue of its destroying all that is unhealthy)[3] hence its invocation in fertility rites, which basically celebrate the perpetuation of the human race.

If there is difficulty in childbirth, an egg or coconut dropped between the woman's legs, while the husband chants, "O mother yoni, spouse of Shiva, give up my child in health," is supposed to be helpful.[4]

Unrequited love is the reason why some turn to witchcraft, and love charms are much sought after. Gypsies and nomadic tribes in India possess recipes for love charms, that are similar to those of their counterparts in Central Europe. Two rituals are described below.

A night before the new moon, the woman will walk to a hill, strip, light a fire and when the flames are leaping, jump clear over the fire, uttering the loved ones name. The other method is to make a flour paste in which hair, nails and saliva of the loved one is mixed. The middle finger of the left hand is pricked and a few drops of the woman's own blood added. The paste is then cooked, fried, baked or boiled, on a full-moon night, after which the woman stands at the cross-roads, chews the paste and mutters, "I chew. for love and life with you," in this way hoping to win the beloved person's love.

The Thira Kathi Attam or the Devil Dance of Kerala is a preliminary to fertility rituals. This dance is centred around an open *mandapam* or stage, with a circular barricade of bamboos. Around this barricade is a rail representing a huge serpent with its hood spread over an improvized altar within the mandapam. The dancers are supposed to personify elements of the nether-world such as *bhootham* (ghosts), pisach and preta (spirits of the dead). The dance is generally performed by the Manamannai, a sub-caste of Kerala, dressed in jute skirts and shrubs.

Similar to the Thira Kathi Attam dance ritual of the Manamannai, is the Nair community's worship of 'Arkola', the spirit of a dead man. The mantravadis within this Malayalee com-

munity indulge in frenzied dancing, vigorous chanting (*japa*) and drum beating. On a moonless (amavasya) night, the eerie ritual swings into motion. The Mantravadis smear their bodies with ashes. Food is offered to the spirit. While dancing, the mantravadis fall into a trance. "They float as though suspended in the air," says a young Malayalee Catholic school teacher, an 'eyewitness' to the ceremony. "It's unbelievable, but I saw them hovering several inches off the ground—suspended only from bamboos. The bamboos themselves were without support, just hanging in the air."

The Attam and the thullal are ostensibly agriculture-related fertility rituals. It is quite common for tribes in India (as in Africa) to celebrate the coming of a new sowing season or the end of the harvest season. These seasons mark the end of a year, and the beginning of a new one—playing out nature's age-old game of life and death. At such times people revel—they engage in a general chasing out of devils and evil influences, or perhaps propitiating them so that the new season being ushered in will be devoid of natural disasters like floods, drought or other calamity (all attributed to devils) that can interfere with their agricultural activities. The improvized snake mentioned is the devata being propitiated, and the bhootham, pisach and preta are the blood-thirsty, insatiable ghouls that have to be propitiated every new agricultural season. In such ceremonies, because of a successful season of sowing or reaping (generally the latter) a spirit of licentiousness prevails, where the participants eat, drink, and even indulge in sexual excess.[5]

The participants in the *thullal* or frenzied dancing mentioned above were obviously intoxicated or hypnotized by the combined strength of intoxicants and the frenzied dancing, which led them to believe that they were actually floating. The young eyewitness must also have taken the intoxicant, whatever it was, and the general mood of the ceremony must have affected him, for it is difficult to imagine anyone witnessing such a ceremony without participating in it somewhat. Hence his reference to the dancers being suspended. Worshipping dead men can also imply ancestor worship, a common phenomenon in African tribes,

The Other Kind of Spell

It is firmly felt that feeding 'enchanted' food to a person or trapping mantras in household objects can bring ill-luck. A tea-pot, chinaware, a chicken 'poisoned' with mantras, pen-knives, voodoo dolls, a chicken or sheep's heart, lemons, human bones, skulls, enchanted eggs brimming with evil. talismans with hair tied to them—all these are considered weapons of the black magician. These can be burnt, roasted, buried or hung behind doors.

In a case in Kerala, members of a wealthy Nair family were said to be suffering mysterious illnesses. The family was warned by a *korava*—one who specializes in 'sniffing out' concealed objects—about evil vibrations emanating from their house. Quivering from top to toe, like a hound on a trail, the korava stopped abruptly at a spot and began digging viciously with his spade. To the surprise of the onlookers, a box was unearthed. It contained mantra-engraved plates, naïl parings, hair and bones. The household came back to normal after the 'cleansing' operation, it is claimed.

A similar belief exists in north India. The *tona* of the Chhattisgarh area of Madhya Pradesh is nothing but scattering mantra-stuffed objects around the house of the intended victim. Even in the Punjab, the belief is unyielding. My mother related the case of her uncle's death and how after he was cremated, a doll was found stuffed into a niche in the compound wall. His family attributed the death of the man to black magic.

In the cases mentioned above, the object did not belong to the victims—but either to animals or other human beings. But the principle involved is the same. Hair, nails, bones, a heart, skulls, lemon (ostensibly because its sourness is equated with the 'sour' or evil aspect of human nature) etc. are all thought to bring on corresponding ailments when used, accompanied by mantric chants (invocation to concerned spirits or deities). Chicken, eggs, and household objects like chinaware, etc. are effective also, provided they are accompanied by 'tangible' mantras—in this case mantra engraved plates.

A common type of black magic in Kerala, Goa and Maharashtra involves the use of a mantra infused lemon and a bunch of chillis. On the other hand, the lemon-chilli phenomenon is also used for exorcism purposes. The lemon, like the coconut. serves a double purpose (the principle of neutrality where an object's powers can be used for good or bad).

As an illustration, the case of a senior sales manager was quoted to me. He was working for a pharmaceutical concern in Andheri, a suburb of Bombay. One morning, a lemon sawed neatly into four parts, with the ends still attached, and a couple of chillis. were found in the office corridor. A superstitious colleague of the sales manager became suspicious of the strange bundle. He avoided it, warning the manager to do the same. The manager, a practical, no-nonsense sort of fellow laughingly kicked it into a corner. The colleague had it collected gingerly with the butt end of a broom and thrown out. A change came over the manager from the moment he kicked it, says the colleague, the sole witness of the incident. The man became gloomy and depressed. His doctor pronounced him physically fit and could not account for his mental state. He could only diagnose it as "acute mental depression."

Finally the disturbed man quit his well-paying job and simply disappeared. "How is it that a practical, happy-go-lucky person, perfectly buoyant in the morning, sinks into a morass of depression in the evening and even contemplates suicide?" the colleague queries. He attributes the manager's 'ill-luck' to his refusal to carry out the appropriate propitiatory puja. "Non-believers are the first victims of black magic," he said, clucking sorrowfully over his ex-colleague's fate.[6]

Boiling a concoction of herbs and inedible flesh, generously spiced with incantations, is yet another method of subjugating enemies. This reminds one of the mythical witch, cackling over her cauldron of bubbling brew. This sort of witchcraft is still believed to be practised by the Nairs of Alleppey, a place between Quilon and Ernakulam in Kerala. The primitive tribe of Kurumbas in the Nilgiri hills of southern India are also noted

for their similar practice of witchcraft. They are known to be employed by other tribes to wreak vengeance on their behalf.

A rosary of lotus seeds, worn at the time of black rituals, is said to enhance the magician's influence. Here again, the common Hindu belief in twin aspects surfaces. The lotus, an important offering in the worship of Lakshmi, the beneficent Hindu goddess of wealth, contains seeds that are used during evil worship. The explanation is that while the beauty of the flower necessitates its use in religious rituals, its seeds, by virtue of being nourished in polluted water (thus assuring an evil aspect) are used as offerings to the deity of black magic.

The powers of evil, it is believed, can be invoked only at midnight and any ritual should be completed before cock-crow, which is considered a bad omen for a black magician. Daybreak is equated with 'light' which is the antithesis of 'darkness' or evil —black forces are believed to be at their peak between midnight and daybreak. This is the belief the world over.

8 Christian "Ghoulash"

A number of power-seeking Christians of the west coast worship the anti-Christ with impunity. Generally, devil-worship amongst the Christians the world over involves the desecration of chalices, crucifixes and the consecrated communion wafers of the church, either by trampling or urinating over them, denouncing the Holy Trinity and declaring ones solidarity with the Anti-Christ. All symbols of Christ and the Holy Virgin are regarded with scorn. Sexual perversion is the antithesis of all Christian ideology and orgies during 'witches' sabbaths (a parody of Christian sabbaths, where one swears solidarity with Christ) are common.

Female devil-worshippers (specially in England) volubly confess that they enjoy "being violated" by the "immense scaly penis of the devil", whose semen is said to be "ice-cold". This probably occurs because of the use of aphrodisiacs and the subsequent orgies. Also a highly vivid imagination coupled with hallucinogens and the aid of auto-suggestion can convert an ordinary orgy into sexual encounters with the 'devil' for the participant. Apart from other lurid sexual details given in these 'confessions', is the one which involves kissing the "nauseating behind" of the devil, who is described either as a large toad or a great, horned creature resembling a goat or a ram.

Many such intriguing cases, fit for the psychoanalyst's couch, have been recorded by the English writer Colin Wilson, in his book *The Occult*. Black magic rites in the West include repulsive sexual fantasies, the desecration of statues of Christ and also of Mary (one such statue in a European church had a rubber penis embedded between the thighs, surrounded by blotches of red paint, signifying the rape of the Holy Virgin), the ravishing

of young virgins with inverted crucifixes, etc. Whether this sort of unholy sabbath has ever taken place amongst the Goan, Maharashtrian or Malayalee Christians is yet not known, though Capt. Colaabavala 'admitted' to having witnessed one in Bombay, in his book *Witchcraft*. But even that sabbath, with its questionable authenticity, involved more Europeans and Americans than Indians. The Christians of the Indian West Coast have 'hinduized' their rituals and if there is any sexual perversion, it is more the influence of Tantric black magic rites. The Hindu black magic rites in the region are, like their Western counterparts, a parody of religious worship. Devi is worshipped, but the offerings are totally 'non-vegetarian'—animal and human flesh, semen, bones, etc. The 'black' prayers are intensely personal and although the use of flesh is involved, flowers and coconuts—symbols of purity—are also used during this form of worship.[1]

Those embracing the anti-Christ in Kerala, trample on the crucifix, and the declaration that they deny Christ from then on is considered ceremony enough to initiate them into the black arts. "In such a case, the man becomes the devotee of pagan gods, or more likely, of the spirit *Chathan*, which is worshipped by mantravadis (those practicing mantra magic) in Kerala," says a Malayalee catholic priest in Bandra, Bombay. The Christian belief is that nobody can serve two masters—Christ and the Devil—at the same time. Indian Christians who are tempted to dabble in witchcraft turn to other religions "the Hindu texts, for example", repeats another priest who has studied Hindu scriptures and holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy. "Some of the most sacred books of the Hindus contain magical mantras for controlling nature. These so-called Christians turn to the mantravadis, who have mastered these mantras, for guidance. But they have first to renounce Christ—for what they are indulging in is unholy."

However, religion and black magic co-exist in certain Goanese households. A hunt in the little Goan fishing villages of Bandra, with their cobbled streets, country liquor shops and crumbling old wooden houses, exposed witchcraft rituals that were an awk-

ward marriage of Hindu and Christian rites. There was the rather unusual case of a picture of Jesus, bearing the vivid portrait of a fearsome tantric deity on its reverse. Daytime saw visitors being ushered in to the house under Christ's friendly vigil, while night saw the preparation of another altar, for the worship of a 'pagan' god. The prayers are a hybrid of Konkani and tantric incantations. A more common practice is to respectfully stow away any symbol of Christ in preparation for the more lucrative invocation of Kali. In this case, the Catholic conscience does not allow Christ and Kali to remain in the same room.

Human and monkey skulls are commonly used in Goanese black magic rituals. Human hair is stuffed into the eye and nose sockets of the grinning monstrosities. The skulls are adored with incense and offerings. This particular ritual is specially popular in the Ponda Bardez district of Goa. The Goanese black magicians, specially the women, are dressed fittingly in black. The nature of the rituals reflects the Christian priests' earlier statements about Hindu rituals influencing Christians. This influence would be explained by the fact that the ancestors of most Indian Christians were Hindus who were converted.

In Goa, the humble coconut has another aspect to it—an echo of the lemon and chilly phenomenon. The coconut has, for the Hindus, a divine significance and is even a symbol of fertility, whereas the Goan Catholics light incense in a coconut shell when practising sorcery. Since it is a symbol of fertility, that may be the reason why it is popular in worship as well as sorcery. Most magic ceremonies are fertility rites (as mentioned before) and a lot of religious rituals are echoes of those ceremonies, with the exception that they have been given religious sanction. Hence, the frequent use of items common to both types of rituals: items such as flowers, coconuts, fruit, etc., and even blood (during Kali puja, for religious as well as magical purposes). A famous example is the Kali puja on the most stupendous scale at Kalighat. The deity is washed in blood. That ceremony is religious. Magical ceremonies using blood are similar.

"Goan Christians have terribly materialistic natures," said a Goan Catholic friend of mine, a journalist with a reputed paper.

"Their acquisitive nature, perhaps, is the reason why they turn to black magic. Coveting other people's property is their only major break from the Lord's Ten Commandments, which are otherwise very piously studied at home." Putting the blame on the "acquisitive" side of human nature is a very simplistic way of explaining the result of poverty. A man is "acquisitive" enough to indulge in black magic, when society does not offer him any tangible satisfaction of his materialistic needs which are basic to human existence. This, with the existence of the whole body of superstitions has made witchcraft in Goa a flourishing business. Curses, apparently, cost the client a minimum of Rs. 5.

During one such ritual witnessed by my friend, the 'witch', a middle-aged Catholic woman, chanted the Kalimantra before three skulls and human thigh-bones, waving incense about for ten minutes. "Your wish will be fulfilled," she gutturally informed the clients, nervously seated behind her. The 'wish' apparently had been a curse aimed at a young girl. They paid the 'witch' her fees and left.

The following morning, my friend made discreet inquiries at the market place about the 'victim', and to his surprise learnt that the girl had suddenly been stricken by a mysterious fever the previous night. The incident could not be a coincidence, he argued. "The witches are genuinely, powerful, even though some of them practise for the fun of it, money not being a consideration for the wealthier ones." Apparently, all that the Goan black magician requires is the name, age, sex and address of the intended victim, and the curse is 'galvanized' into motion.

During a stroll in another Goan settlement in Bandra a crabbed old woman pulled me into her doorway. She had heard about my interest in occult practices from her neighbour, whom I had met just the day before. The lady, a Goan Catholic, claimed to have been a victim of black magic in her youth. "I was pregnant at that time," she croaked. "We Goans believe that pregnant women are often bewitched by jealous women. I saw a ghost in the guise of a man walking to and fro outside my home one morning." Her jaded eyes wandered searchingly all over the room, as though seeking out the malignant spirit.

"I was petrified. The best thing in such a case is not to be scared because a spirit always possesses a frightened person."

"There's a girl in my locality," she continued, "she was in the lavatory one night when she saw this giant pig which suddenly shrank and then expanded. It was of course, a spirit—maybe the same one—and because she was frightened, it possessed her."

Mohammad Yusuf, alias Munshiji of Kurla, echoes this point, "A weak and gullible person is infinitely more prone to possession by Shaitan." This though crudely put, sounded a lot like the psychiatrists' theory that fear and insecurity make a person susceptible to superstitions.

The old lady then delved into the infamous Goan 'evil eye' phenomenon. The belief in the 'evil eye' is shared by the 'witches' of Europe, specially those of Italian origin. An ancient Italian text even describes how to develop the power. According to this text the devil is supposed to have told his followers: "If you bear anyone ill-will, look them full in the eye and wish them every evil in my name." 'Evil-eye' is known as 'buri nazar' in North India and you often see threats in the form decorative squiggles behind trucks and vehicles, warning the evil wisher of unsavoury consequences for his 'evil' or covetous intentions.

The evil eye phenomenon reiterates the original idea of aiming a thought or curse at someone and succeeding in it. The phenomenon becomes evil only if a person aims a nasty thought at someone, with the 'hope' (accompanied, again, by a fervent wish which is actually a petition in disguise to the powers that be) that a particular kind of harm befalls the person.

Chillis along with flour, *phatki* (alum salts), and human hair are used to rid a person of the 'evil eye' effect. Chillis and lemon are also hung up outside doors or on vehicles, to protect them from it. Along with the 'evil eye' is the 'evil tongue' phenomenon' which is the power inherent in a person to successfully 'curse' another. Such people, according to a Goan belief, have 'spotted' tongues!

In Cuncolim—Goa's alleged sorcery centre, near Margao—legend has it that a witch's corpse which the local church refused

to consecrate, remained fresh for a year and a half after it was buried unceremoniously in a public cemetery. Her powers were potent enough (even after death) to preserve her body.

Most Goans, however literate, have a total belief in the devil and witchcraft. Ironically, all devout Christians are nurtured on stories involving devil-worship and almost each family, as in Kerala, can 'remember' at least one encounter with a ghost or black magic. This belief in witchcraft may perhaps be the reason why high walls have been built around some cemeteries in Goa, in order to prevent the desecration of graves by devil-worshippers.

9 The Muslim Menagerie

While Hindus of the Indian West Coast indulge in an obvious form of witchcraft employing eggs, coconut, lemon, roses, hibiscus, corpses, ashes, human urine, parts of the human body etc., Muslims of the region, specially Maharashtra, are less fussy. They believe in a less complicated though equally diabolical form of the black art. They write out their 'curses' in Arabic, using saffron on a thin tissue, and quietly dissolve it in the victim's drink. Some particular Quranic incantations are said to be powerful enough to invoke *khabiz* (ghosts) so that a man is haunted for life. Like the Hindu Gayatri Mantra, powerful Quranic verses are supposed to be chanted regularly by the devout, and any discrepancy in the chant is said to drive a man crazy. The chapters dealing with these verses are discussed a little later. These verses or chants are said to be potent invocations of spirits which, the Muslims believe, populate the world. Like the Hindus, the Muslims too think that the propitiatory verses are ultimately powerful enough to subjugate the spirits. These spirits, like the Hindu deities, are believed to be subject to the same impulses and world order as humans, and can be controlled by the incantations (they can never be above them), just as humans are.

In this context, I was told of the well-publicized case of a Muslim bus conductor, who began chanting incantations that were supposed to be repeated 1,000 times a day continuously for seven to ten days. Like a well-oiled automaton, he chugged on successfully for the first few days and as a reward for his devotion began receiving money under his pillow. Gradually his discipline slackened. Soon after he was reported to have become "insane".

In this context there is a surprising similarity between the Muslim and the Tantric mantric philosophies, in that religious incantations are looked upon with respect—they are capable of rewarding a person spiritually, mentally and physically; conversely they also possess a potential for evil, if used to gratify a selfish desire. In case the magician uses them for evil, he has to suffer the results of his action, and Muslims are even more emphatic than Hindu or Christians about the hell or *jahannum* that awaits a black magician.

The Muslims believe that if one wishes to get the 'protection' of a good spirit, there is a very difficult ritual, which, if mastered, results in the perenial companionship of a *maukil* or good spirit that fulfils one's wishes. The ritual is also dangerous, they say, in that many *jinnats* (spirits) materialize and terrify one—in order to call a halt to one's meditations—for it is said that spirits, like humans, hate being enslaved. Forty unflinching days of reading particular passages of the Quran, either in a cemetery or in waist-deep water on an isolated beach, is the primary requirement. If ones place of meditation is a cemetery, then a magic circle has to be drawn, within which one squats. The circle is meant to protect one from *syphili* or evil spirits, and is a lot like the mythical Hindu *chakra* and the Christian 'pentacle' which are also drawn to prevent evil spirits from stepping within. Only very brave people undertake this frightful task and even they are said to quake in their shoes. Since the incantations are powerful, an *ustad* or guru is essential as a guide, for like the Sanskrit mantras, they are difficult to pronounce, and if mispronounced, the combined numerical strength of the letters in the words could produce adverse vibrations. The power acquired after successfully completing 40 days of chanting and mastering a maukil can be used for either good or evil. The man has his option.

The maukil or spirit once subjugated, guides the 'master' throughout his life and also protects him from harm. But since it has been mastered, it can also be forced to perform a task set by the magician, which is evil in nature. The maukil successfully completes the evil task, goes the belief, but will ulti-

mately take its revenge on the black magician for forcing it to do the undesirable. "The maukil is essentially a good spirit," says Haji Muhammed Hussain, respected occult guru of Mahim. "It's like feeding a talisman or taweez (meant originally as a protection against evil) brimming with evil to a person. It will certainly have its effect, in that the victim will go mad, but the black magician responsible for it will also die a terrible death."

"The maulvis make taweezes which are evil in themselves," he warns. "Any taweez must be looked at askance. A powerful mantra or incantation may have been slipped into it."

The rituals for controlling a maukil bear a marked resemblance to tantric rites which aim at developing siddhis, in the sense that they are also difficult and a test for any man's powers of endurance. These magical rites were deliberately made difficult so that the common man could not follow them, and would go in quest of those who claimed they could. Most of these self-styled gurus were freuds, bent upon exploiting the people's gullibility. Those who did undertake these penances used auto-suggestion and hallucinogens like charas to convince themselves of their powers.

10 Beejamantras

Beejamantras are *beej aksharas,* or seed syllables that are added to a particular mantra to enhance its power. Each beej akshara specifies a god or goddess and his or her attributes. For example, OM specifies Brahma or the universe; HRIM, strength or *shakti* (referring to Durga or Shakti—Shiva's wife); KLIM, invoking Kama, the god of love; SHRIM or SHRI, invoking Vishnu, etc. HUM FHUT is a mantric weapon, chanted for injuring or killing someone. HRIM is generally used with the prefix OM, for prayers to superior gods and goddesses like Rama, Krishna, Vasudeva, Sita, etc.

Most of these beejams perform the function of propitiating the particular deity.

The beejams *Om hrau jyoon seh* said together as *Omhraujyoon-seh,* and *hrin hain reem hriday hraun* chanted in the pattern of *hriday hrin hrain hraun reem* with ones desires in full mental focus, are said to produce explosive results. These beejams are often thought to be used for influencing someone's mind and behaviour. The chants, coupled with rituals performed while squatting on the skin of a dog, pig, cat, jackal or snake are believed to unleash destructive spirits.

But it is said that holy men or sadhus believed to have attained siddhis or paranormal powers by following the right-handed path of tantra (explained under a separate chapter on tantra), cannot, even if they try distort the mantras because of their inherent 'purity'.

Deer or tiger skins used as squatting mats are also said to nullify the black magic potential of these beejams, since the skins belong to animals that are considered 'holy' by the Hindus. For example, the tiger, is considered to be goddess Durga's mount.

This emphasis on 'purity' is very similar to the maukil phenomenon—where the truly devout Muslim, if he keeps himself 'clean and pure' during those 40 days, will also find it extremely difficult to descend to the level of the black magician. The rules are strict. The man must bathe regularly (physical cleanliness is a prerequisite for spiritual purity), bear no one any ill-will, pray 5 times a day, abstain from odorous food like garlic and, above all, should be utterly devoted to Allah.

According to Muhammed Yusuf, perhaps the only difference between the Muslim and the Hindu *sadhaka* is, that while a Hindu cannot indulge in evil in the name of Durga, even if he attempts it,[1] his Muslim counterpart, the *pir* can force a spirit to do evil on his behalf, for during his 40-day ritual he begins controlling the good as well as bad jinnhs (spirits).

11 Tantra Magic

Tantra is based on the concept of union, also known as *yoga*, between the creator and the creation. And even though the goal of tantra is the attainment of total *samadhi* (union with the almighty), sex—either real or imaginary—is the foundation of the philosophy. The union of Shiva and Shakti, the basic concept of tantra, entails the union of the *sadhaka* (tantric) and his *yogini* or female partner, seen as 'Shakti', either physically or through inner visualization.

Witchcraft is believed to be practised at a stage when the sadhaka acquires siddhis. Few reach that stage, but once reached, even fewer escape it, for siddhis, meant to be by-products of the *sadhana* (an act performed with great perseverence) and no doubt very essential ones, tend to trap a sadhaka into making them an end in themselves. Most sadhakas at this stage get tempted into living the lives of 'miracle men', forgetting the great goal they had initially set for themselves—that of spiritual detachment from the world.

Another trap in tantra, is the *vamacharya* or the left-handed path, in which the sadhaka worships the five ingredients of the sadhana, or the five M's: *Mansa* (meat), *Matsya* (fish), *Madya* (wine), *Mudra* (grain) and *Maithuna* (sexual union), forbidden to the yogi or the follower of the *dakshinacharya* or right-handed path. The vamachari partakes of these ingredients literally, while the dakshinachari only does so in a metaphoric or indirect sense, imagining the sexual act of Shiva and Shakti instead of consummating it with a yogini. According to the path followed, the female partner is called *bhogya shakti* (to be enjoyed) or *pujya shakti* (to be worshipped). The premise here is that in order to attain self realization, an indulgence in sensual pleasures—

sex being the most vital—is essential, within a ritualistic frame-work (in order to avoid over-indulgence). The left-handed path is dangerous, in that a lust-crazed individual can be trapped permanently at that stage. He then makes the sex act, which should be a means to the end of total samadhi, an end in itself.

"Lust for the sake of lust is the greatest enemy of tantra," says one tantric text. The tantrics believe that such a person is no longer a true sadhaka and exposes himself to physical, mental and spiritual destruction. Because of this inherent risk, only the most strong-willed and more advanced of tantrics of the Anuttaragoha, Vamacharya, Siddhantacharya or Kaula sects follow the left-handed path. Because of the importance attached to sex in black magic, the black art among tantrics is practised only by the followers of the left-handed path. The rituals for acquiring siddhis are the same for followers of both paths, the only difference being between those practicing sex and those 'visualizing' it, abstaining from the actual act.

All tantric sadhana presupposes a thorough practical knowledge of *Hathayoga*, the science of breath control and postures. "All tantrism," said the anthropologist Mircea Eliade, a Western scholar of tantra, "presupposes mastery of the intricate Hatha-yoga training."

Before we venture into a description of tantric practice, it is important to clarify certain terms and the break up of the Kundalini's (the sex energy force) journey to the head. 'Subtle body', *chakras*, *nadis*, etc., are terms employed for the inner rhythms, or energy flow within the body which needs to be systematically directed so as to achieve spiritual progress. The whole tantric system (yoga too) is geared to making the Kundalini rise from the mooladhara chakra (its resting place) based below the genitals and above the rectum, to the sahasrara chakra, based at the top of the head. At this stage, the yogi is declared to have attained 'Nirvana' or spiritual bliss—the ultimate stage in yoga and tantra.

The Kundalini's 'Upward' Journey

When awakened, through tantric exercises and the practice of breath control of *pranayama*, the kundalini climbs from the

mooladhara chakra to the *swadhishthana chakra.* A little more practice of pranayama and it reaches the *manipuraka chakra* or the *anahata chakra.* At this point, the sadhak reaches the spiritual stage and detaches himself from the consciousness associated with the three lower chakras, which have more to do with the physical or sensual world, granting the sadhak a healthy, disease-free life. Because of his initiation into the spiritual domain, the sadhak at this stage becomes emotionally disturbed—he receives a 'culture shock' of a different dimension.

Further tantric or yogic 'exertions', and the Kundalini permeates the *vishudhi chakra* and then the *agni chakra.* At this point 'voices of the higher mind' are said to be heard. This is said to open the 'third eye' (situated between the eyes) which enables one to see beyond the physical world. Miraculous powers are said to be achieved at this stage by the sadhaka, who can use them as he wishes. To reach this stage itself is extremely difficult—only after years of unrelenting *tapasya,* severe penance and self-abnegation, is a person successful in gaining siddhis.

The final stage—that of the Kundalini flowing into the sahasrara chakra is nearly impossible. Only the most spiritually progressive sadhakas attain it, after torturous sadhana.

Even before the Kundalini reaches the sahasrara chakra, the sadhaka can perform any miracle and it is then his choice to continue to work for self-realization or to stop short of the goal —remaining satisfied with his paranormal powers. Many sadhus and babas—'miracle men'—are said to be sadhakas who have remained at that stage, as the *tapasya* for the stage beyond is too tough for the frail human brain and body. It is here that the sadhaka decides whether or not to use his powers for witchcraft—either white, like that practised by the Nambudiris of Kerala and the 'miracle' babas and gurus of Karnataka (Sathya Sai Baba) and Maharashtra, or black like that of the Aghori Panthis, the seamy tantrics who function more to harm others, either for money or because of a personal vendetta. According to the Aghori Panthis, "Virtue is not a condition precedent for the acquisition of siddhis—strict sadhana is."

Yama and Niyama

Tantric practice is made up of the disciplines *yama* and *niyama*. Yama which stands for truth and non-violence, generally involves the partaking of sattvic foods. No meat, fish, eggs, onions, strong spices or oils are allowed. Here, there is a striking similarity between the sattvic tantric and the Maharashtrian Muslim attempting to master a maukil. They too are expected to abstain from such non-vegetarian fare. The Christians of Malabar, on the other hand, are not expected to undertake any such rigorous diet during penance and prayer. This discipline, is not observed by the followers of the Vamacharya path either; for them worship includes the use of these very articles. Here again one man's taboo is another man's ritual. By avoiding contact with flesh—either as food or as a means of satisfying carnal desires —the Dakshinachari hopes to avoid influences attached to the sensual world. 'Purity'—mental and physical—they feel, is the best way to attain nirvana. Hence, even the all-important union of Shiva and Shakti—central to Tantra—is visualized, (more as a union of cosmic forces than of flesh and blood) rather than enacted.

Niyama stands for postures or *asanas*. Sadhana makes use of asanas because they are considered to free a body from strain and are also helpful for 'inner awakening'. The asana is also the governing factor when the sadhaka and yogini are in union during the advanced sadhanas of the yoga tantra class. Maithuna, or sexual intercourse is regulated by asanas in that the act of penetration and the subsequent intercourse are strictly within the framework of certain prescribed postures. In this sense, sex becomes controlled and is considered part of the sadhana.

The tantric sadhakas generally make use of the following practices.

Asanas or postures are important for easy circulation of energies and for physical comfort. They also give psychic protection.

Pranayama or breath control, is an aid to concentration. The kundalini shakti, of enormous potential, is controlled through this practice.

Mantrayana is the japa (chanting) of inner 'matrix' sounds (mantras). It is used in conjunction with pranayama as an aid to concentration which will help the kundalini shakti to awaken and rise.

Yantras or form structures are the visualization of form with regard to its relationship with sound or mantras and invoked energy, which is the deity, or devata.

Mandalas are the mystic circles of initiation of the neophyte. A particular sadhaka is literally insulated by the confines of a 'magical circle' (akin to the Muslim's protective circle and the Christian pentacle) which would protect the Sadhaka against the powerful forces invoked during a sadhana.

Mudra, or gesture: generally the precise interweaving of the fingers or ritual gesture, as an aid to concentration. Mudra and asana are closely related.

Dhyana is mental visualization of the invoked deity (devata) and meditation on it.

Sandhya involves meditation on the subtle body (nadi and chakra) and on the release of the Kundalini shakti.

Tarpana, or 'purification' (usually with incantations) of the elements is symbolically a very important practice during sadhana.

Nyasa is the physical identification of beejamantras with parts of the body, activated by touch, and also the subtle identification with the subtle body (chakras) and the invoked energy (devata).

Shuddhi stands for the five ingredients or five M's of the sadhana—Madya (wine), Matsya (fish) Mansa (meat) Mudra (in this context, it means grain) and Maithuna (sexual union). The Buddhist tradition refers to these as the *panchatantra* or five essences.

The left handed-path followers who actually partake of these five essences practice their rites at midnight or any other time. Right-handed rites have specific times for practice.

The central sadhana of tantrism as mentioned earlier, is the exercise of Maithuna (union) under tantric 'laboratory' conditions. "It is irrelevant in the final analysis," says Agehananda Bharati, an authority on tantra, "whether these

sadhanas were or are literally performed or whether they are hypothesized (imagined) entirely." All this depends on the tradition of Sadhana followed (Vamacharya or Dakshinacharya), the guru, and the rate of advancement of the initiate.

The sadhana is relevant only in so much as it is performed in the prescribed manner. Sex is considered important in tantra for the same reasons that it has been in sorcery—the only difference being that some sex-related tantric rituals have acquired religious sanction. That is why Shiva devotees worship the Shivalingam—or the phallus of Shiva. The lingam, if observed, is seen to be an inverted penis, worshipped by thousands of common people including virgins, who beseech the lingam (considered to be the essence of Shiva) to send them husbands. Sex is a creative act—and the instinct of primitive man to procreate and perpetuate his kind, at a time when survival was a daily struggle with nature, still survives and is central to all religions and magical beliefs. Hence a number of religious rituals including tantric and other magical rites, are basically fertility rites.

The Ritual Proper

Sadhana can either be practised alone, with a partner or in a circle (chakra). When performed in a circle—generally of 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 16 or 32 couples—the guru, or the most senior sadhaka and his 'Shakti' or female partner remain in the middle and are 'worshipped' as the individual gurus of each of the members of the circle. Those who are not married, are married according to tantric tradition—that is, the virgins are put through the 'divine' sexual act—if they belong to the Vamacharya sect.

The ritual proper coincides with the formation of a chakra, the circle of male and female sadhakas, or in tantric phraseology, of the 'Shivas' with their 'Shaktis'. Each sadhaka has his 'Shakti' on the right side, in the case of right-handed tantric ritual, and on his left, in the case of the ritual that is being described, which is really the core of tantric ritual in general.

The sadhana begins with both partners bathing, all the time thinking of the cosmic purpose of the sadhana. The 'Shakti' is anointed with perfume—generally of musk, patchouli or sandal-

wood and is garlanded with flowers. Incense and lamps are lit and the guru is worshipped with the offerings of flowers, lamps, incense, etc. The couple will repeat the mantra of initiation and generally also the mantra related to the deity or the devta to be invoked. If the Shakti following the left-handed path has not been initiated into the Maithuna, she will be, with the mantra HRIM (the Shakti beejam) whispered into her ear. This will be followed by meditation on the four tantric 'seats' (pitths), both as directions and as the four main chakras, of the subtle body. This meditation is called the sandhya.

The next stage is tarpana or "purification of the elements". This will take place generally in front of a fire, accompanied by pranayama (breath movement), mudra (ritual) gestures and the beejamantras of the elements to be purified repeated mentally. The seat will then be 'cleansed' ritually and the couple will sit in asana, side by side. The asana used at this stage is generally *padmasana* (lotus posture), *virasana* (half lotus posture) or a similar comfortable position.

The ritual commences with the installation of the *patras*, which are bowls to hold the ingredients. These are of specific form and material (copper. silver, gold: the 3 basic elements of earth) and, according to the tradition of the sadhana, are placed upon bases of *yantras* (designs) which are drawn, accompanied by mantras, mudra and pranayama. The ritual here varies from sadhana to sadhana, according to the type and purpose of the practice. Hemp is generally taken just prior to the installation of the vessels. It is taken as a sweet or a drink or sometimes smoked, for added concentration, or rather 'intoxication'. The body organs are purified by mantras and the Kundalini shakti is visualized as 'ready to rise' from the lower regions. The four ingredients meat, fish, wine, grain or their substitutes (ginger. lemon, rice and bhang for the right hand path followers) are placed in the bowls, their meaning is meditated on, mantras of purification are chanted and gestures of propitiation are made

Food is the sustainer of life, and hence a vital offering to the deity. Meditating on the wine (as ambrosia or *amrit*) and the food, as representative offerings to the deity, of the animal world

(meat), aquatic world (fish), and the vegetable world (grain), the sadhaka and 'Shakti' will take the bowl of wine in one hand and some shuddhi (food offering) in the other and will together first offer it to the 'invoked' deity (the devi Kundalini or patroness of Kundalini power) by bringing the two bowls together from the base (*mandala,* platform or seat) to the head (sahasrara chakra). While they do this, they visualize the Kundalini devi (Kundalini shakti as goddess) rising up through the centres (each one visualized with the beejamantras appropriate to the chakras mentally repeated) to "union in the etheric of the head".

The hands are then washed and the final 'tattva' (maithuna or sexual union—practised strictly by the Vamacharya sect) is proceeded with. The 'Shakti' is wrapped in a red robe of silk or wool and anointed. Water (sometimes even wine, is sprinkled over her and incense may be lit. Then the sadhaka touches her forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, lobes of ear, hollow of throat, breast, arms, hands, thighs, *yoni* (vagina), knees and feet with the right hand, (symbolizing the limbs and senses, central to human existence) while pronouncing the mantrikas (letters of the sanskrit alphabet) and also the beejamantra of the deity. The 'Shakti' must be seen as the "goddess incarnate" at that time. Then seated in posture, the 'Shakti' will be taken by the sadhaka. "Linga and yoni, vajra and padma, Shiva and Shakti will become one. This unity (*samarasa*) is the essence of sadhana. It is the true yoga, union."

The creative power of this union is applied to the creation of the cosmos itself, and specially the elements of the earth. Here again, human logic is applied to nature as well. Just as humans are born out of the union of man and woman, so must the elements be born of the union of cosmic forces. The description is graphic.

"At the union of *vajra* (rock, symbolizing the linga) and *padma* (lotus, representing the yoni) earth arises from the contact. From the flow of semen (*shukra*) water arises, and fire arises from the friction. Wind comes from the motion, and space corresponds to the bliss," says the Hevajra Tantra (one of the tantric texts). Once in union (maithuna) with the yogini, the yogi aims to retain the sperm, which is seen as the "blended cosmic essence."

This is controlled sex, where ejaculation is disallowed, because the sperm, due to its reproductive properties, is considered precious and hence sacrosanct. Hence, though there is movement, it is not excessive. This controlled sex "is the cause of great pleasure, the origin of all breathing creatures and the root of the world which is without beginning or end." (Quotations from Maha-nirvana Tantra and Kulacudamani Tantra texts.)

Through the proper exercise of the rituals, it is said, one can attain siddhis or miraculous powers. According to the most ancient yoga traditions, the siddhis can be classified according to the five sources, from which they are derived, as follows:

Janmaja (*birth-related*) *siddhis*—co-existent with birth, coming from actions in previous life. Astrological influence can generate such siddhis too.

Mantraja (*yogic*) *siddhis*—Coming from skill at mantrayana —the science of subtle sound and the related techniques of pranayama and yantra making. Included here are hatha-yoga, asanas and mudras. When correctly activated, a mantra can act on the external world, producing many types of 'inexplicable' phenomena.

Tapaja (*penance-related*) *siddhis*—The practice of austerities sometimes produces such a degree of *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), that siddhis are developed. Ascetic practices such as extreme fasting, exposure to the elements, complex asanas, and non-differentiation between external and internal subject and object, produce these siddhis. (The Naga, Avdhut, Aghori, Nath and Kapalika cults specialize in such techniques. The Hindu god Shiva is also said to have derived siddhi in this manner).

Ausadhija (*herb-related*) *siddhis*—These are siddhis gained from the exact use of herbs, drugs and elixirs, which derive from an ancient tradition of substances to expand the consciousness. The Nathist, Siddha, Rasa, Kalpa, Unani and Ayurveda schools (all interrelated) developed techniques for the identification of elements, purification, isolation and combination of elements in their primary (non-toxic) form. Metals, precious stones, herbs, poisons, venoms as well as complex organic products may be blended according to their

elemental characteristics, into medicines and elixirs. Perhaps the tradition of tantrics consuming hashish, ganja and charas can be traced back to this reliance on the consciousness expanding or better still, hallucinogenic properties of these herbs. Throughout the world there are reports of similar techniques being used for the generation of psychic or 'occult' powers.

Samadhija (*sadhana relating*) *siddhi*—These are the siddhis derived from intense 'samadhi' or meditation. Siddhis are the natural manifestation of the subtle body, or *prana*, Sadhana develops the siddhi. Astronomical and astrological influences, specially the phases of the moon, have a potent effect on the subtle body, which in turn governs the activity of the body. As a result, all sadhanas, which are practised in order to develop must be practised at the exact time and period of the month prescribed. Midday, midnight, the eighth and fourteenth days of the dark fortnight—the lunar month being divided into the light (*Shukla*) and dark (*Krishna*) fortnights—are the most favourable periods for the practice of sadhanas. The fifth day after the menses of the yogini is considered specially potent for the maithuna sadhana, since her fertility at this point would be at its peak.

Though tradition varies as to the siddhis and their methods of release, here are some of the better known siddhis:

Animan: the faculty of being able to reduce matter to the most minute.

Mahiman: the faculty of being able to expand without any limit.

Lahiman: the power to make objects light (levitation).

Kariman: the power to make objects heavy.

Prapti: knowledge of everything past, present and future

Ishittva: supreme power.

There are also the siddhis of healing, communication with animals, control of hunger and thirst, thought transference, transformation, consciousness transference, knowledge of past lives, knowledge of distant universes and cosmic consciousness.

Nik Douglas author of *Tantra Yoga* asserts that in the later medieval periods, tantric practices became mixed with the pre-

Aryan Kapalika, Aghori and Shaivite rites (tantra was an Aryan contribution), with the Baathist and Shakfa rites, and also with the more primitive tribal and animist influences, with the result that the practices became associated with the idea of sacrifice, often of an objectionable kind. Areas corresponding to modern Bengal, Assam, Orissa and Bihar still remained centres of tantric practices in spite of the shortage of really developed teachers, mostly due to the Muslim persecution of Tantric followers from the 13th century onwards. The resultant misinterpretation of the tantric texts through not understanding the real meaning of the allegorical *sandhyabhasha* (twilight language), greatly changed the mode of worship, with the result that tantrism fell into disrepute.

Nik Douglas and Agehananda Bharati feel that tantra is the new 'scientific hope for the future', but distortions that have crept in, with unscrupulous tantrics concentrating more on intoxicating themselves, and over-indulging in sex, have, instead given tantra a bad name. So has the fanaticism practised by some sects, like the Anand Margis, who are reported to have killed their colleagues for political reasons. The apologists for tantra feel that tantric groups, developing into commercial, money-spinning organizations which operate only for the material comforts and pleasure of the leaders, have entirely lost sight of the goal. The fake swamis of today are mere conjurers and magicians, who are fleecing the naive and encouraging repulsive activities, while giving the 'genuine' ones a bad name.

Sorcery, Tantra Style

A sadhak who turns to black magic for monetary gain uses his newly awakened power to curse, gain further power at the expense of others, or for 'mooth', which is 'murder by remote control'.

In 1964, a tantric *maran* (death) yagna was reported to have been held for 41 days at the Durga temple of Vindhyachal in Mirzapur, for the purpose of killing Nehru. Known political personalities were allegedly involved. Within three months of that time, Nehru expired. Many believed that his death had a connection with the yagna. When a Minister in Nehru's Council

of Ministers boasted to a journalist of the London *Times* that he "recognized the symptoms of death in Nehru" and that he had "seldom been wrong in his predictions", the journalist, a Mr. Stacy wrote, "Personal chatter like this in a superstitious land like India falls little short of witchcraft."

Aghori, or those practising the seamy side of tantra, are known to eat corpses, and have intercourse with them too. Many tantrics meditate on human skulls (the brain being the repository of intelligence) in graveyards and cremation grounds. This is reputed to give them power over demons and spirits. The reason for these cemetery visitations is that death is the 'great equalizer' and a destroyer of all ego. It spares no one. No place reeks more of man's vulnerability, no matter what his status in life, than the cremation ground or graveyard. That is perhaps the reason why sadhus smear themselves with ash—as a reminder of the end common to all (though ash also keeps the body warm).

Necromancy

Necromancy is a prominent part of tantra magic. Animals and even humans are slain as sacrifice for the purpose. Rituals are of a soul-shuddering nature that only the very courageous or the very perverted can undertake. Corpses of young women are said to be warmed on hot bricks for the necromancer to copulate with. Sex with a human or even an animal corpse, with the ejaculation of semen, is said to revitalize the corpse, or at the very least, bring its spirit under the control of the necromancer. Semen is considered as potent as blood in tantric rituals—for it is considered a life giver, and hence potent enough to bring corpses back 'to life'.

The fact that skulls are also used for necromantic purposes, is borne out by the hundreds of skulls revealed by police raids on Anand Marg premises in India.

The use of skulls and sexual organs during tantric rituals again evoke the same principles as those underlying non-tantric black magic rites. Objects are used (this also includes flowers, semen, saffron robes etc.) during rituals as a guide to the gods. Skulls represent the 'essence' of a living human being, and copu-

lation, the creative sex energy attributed to the gods. Thus with the help of these objects and acts, man hopes to receive the powers attributed to both humans and gods, by the grace of the gods who are besought by him through prayer.

Chicken-hearted necromancers have often lost their minds out of fear and even expired of shock. The necromancers, during rituals wear the shroud of the corpse, or its clothes. During this time they are said to live on dog's flesh and flesh cooked in an inverted skull, near the corpse. Stale food is the antithesis of healthy food and has no life-preserving properties. Hence such food is eaten to please ghosts that hate the living. Unleavened chapattis without salt (since salt is associated with preservation and life, hence taboo for the ritual) are eaten. Some necromancers, surprisingly, abstain from sex, too, during this period.[1]

Human corpses are said to be brought back to life in order to receive the spirit's 'blessings', or for the more nefarious purpose of 'trapping' a spirit to do one's bidding. 'Corpse awakening' is a very important ritual of tantra. The ceremony takes place on Kalichawdas day—on the pre-amavasya night, or the 14th day of the month. The time is between midnight and one o'clock—the spirit world is believed to be most active at that time. The practitioner burns herbs, charas, hemlock, dung and other evil-smelling objects. The flesh of another corpse is eaten or 'shared' (thrown to the spirit world.)

A magic circle is drawn around the particular grave, which is then opened. The corpse brought out of it is kept within the circle—with its head facing east. The black magician touches the body three times with a wand of human thigh bone or his sacrificial knife, and commands it, in the name of Kali, to rise and answer.

On the right side of the corpse, are placed the five tantric elements, symbolizing human existence, of which food is an essential part. Semen is also kept there to signify maithuna or sexual intercourse. The five ingredients are offered to the corpse with cries of "Eat, eat". The tantric then touches the corpse, chanting mantras in the name of Kali, again commanding the corpse to rise. At this point, the corpse rises, answers questions put to it and then is "put back to sleep" by the tantrics, through

mantra power. The corpse forecasts the future, which aids the tantrics in the practice of tantric magic.

Case

A Kannadiga journalist friend of mine working in Bangalore, who has dabbled in tantra and written several books on the subject, swears to having witnessed one such ritual.

He went along to a graveyard with four necromancers, about to indulge in such a 'corpse awakening' One of the tantrics had a shady past. A young woman he once coveted, married another man, but his lust for her raged unabated. One fateful day he went to her house where he found, to his delight, that her husband was out. Seizing the opportunity, he made obscene advances towards her and, when she rebuked him, 'cursed' her through the power of mantras. The girl died mysteriously the next day.

The day following her death, she was buried and, as chance would have it, the four tantrics decided to go through their corpse rites that very night. They chose that very grave as it had been freshly dug (judging by the way the earth was loosely scattered over it), which meant that the burial was recent and the spirit of the corpse still hovering near the body and therefore more easily accessible. The tantric responsible for her death, not realizing that it was her corpse, was startled to see it when it was pulled out, but then calmed down, reminding himself that the girl was nothing but a harmless corpse, at the mercy of his powerful mantras. With due ceremony the corpse was brought to life. As it slowly rose from its bed of leaves and twigs, the four tantrics prepared themselves for offerings in order to obtain its 'blessings'. Unfortunately for our tantric friend, the corpse was truly 'awakened' and when it caught sight of him, it made its way slowly towards the terrified man, hypnotizing him with its stare. On reaching him, it clutched his throat in a steely grip. The man would have been strangled, had his horrified friends not had the presence of mind to chant the powerful mantras meant to 'deactivate' a corpse. The corpse was reluctantly driven back to its 'bed' where it lay down stiffly, and the last vestiges of life finally ebbed out of it, leaving it lifeless again.

Needless to say, the experience was too traumatic for the four to undertake rendezvous with another corpse.

Eye-witness accounts—or so they are claimed to be—run into dozens, if one is chatting with a group of tantrics. Corpses are said to rise and reply to questions in hollow voices. "It's a frightening experience," said one 31-year-old graveyard frequenter. People claiming knowledge of tantra claim that a corpse can be "kept in power" from the night of *amavasya* (moonless night) till *purnima* (full moon night). The spirit trapped within is then 'rewarded' for obeying the tantric—by releasing it. This can be done by immersing the corpse in lime and then burning it, or by cutting it into small pieces for birds and animals to feed on. Some tantrics, before destroying the corpse, cut off its head and mount it on a plate engraved with magical symbols; this is permanently retained by the necromancer for the purpose of communicating with the spirit as and when he wishes.

The human skull is important in tantric worship because the brain is "the most important reservoir of forces controlling the subconscious". Since the skull is directly in touch with it, "many astounding 'siddhis' or supernatural powers come to these who meditate sitting on *panchamundi* or *saptamundi* (five or seven skulls)" writes Ajit Mookerjee in his book, *Tantra Asana.*

Sexual Rites

A quotation from the *Karpuradistotram,* translated from the original Sanskrit, goes: "O Goddess Kali, he who, on Tuesday midnight, having uttered your mantra makes an offering to you in the cremation ground just once of a pubic hair from his female partner (Shakti) pulled out by the root, wet with semen poured from his penis into her menstruating vagina, becomes a great poet, a Lord of the world and will always travel on an elephant back"—undoubtedly like a king.

The *Narada Purana,* an ancient text of the Hindus, also gives complicated rites in all their ghastly detail for the purpose of achieving worldly success through occult powers. It involves the worship of Kali over a period of time. According to the text, worshipping a vagina with the chanting of the Kalimantra 1,000 times gives one the "power of speech".

It goes on to say that if a naked person with matted hair, chants Kalimantra 10,000 times in a cemetry, he is bound to have every success in life. If the same person sits on a corpse and worships Kali with arka flowers mixed with his own semen and repeats Kalimantra, "he becomes a King within a short period". Also, if a man meditating on the genital organs of a woman during her menstrual periods chants the Kalimantra, he is sure to become a popular poet.

In connection with the Paustika practices, the *Narada Purana* describes a sacrifice to Kali with the flesh of animals such as the cat, camel, donkey, etc., to be performed at midnight on the 14th day of the dark half of the lunar month. The performance of a tarpana or libation with blood is also described. If, says the text, a person sits on a corpse in a cemetery, temple, mountain, forest, or any other lonely place, and, looking at, touching or in union with a woman, offers to Kali the sacrifice "of a person killed in war or of a six-month-old child", he is said to acquire *vidya* (knowledge).

(Sexual rituals are common in the West too, where witches sabbaths involve nude participants. The high point of the sabbath is usually an orgy, considered important both for the initiate as well as the veterans seeking power from the devil.)

The Tailor's Curse

In a small village a few miles from Bangalore, a 22 year old boy was known to have been 'possessed' by a spirit through black magic rites. The boy complained of headache and chest pain constantly. This was said to be the reason why he behaved odd, for his conversation was always nonsensical. He was taken to a Christian hospital in Bangalore by his harassed relatives where the doctors could not diagnose his illness. He was then taken to Vellore. Curiously, he suddenly stopped gibbering even though his pain raged unabated. He either ate too much or not at all, and slept almost 24 hours a day. He also developed the habit of walking aimlessly for miles at a stretch. This irregular life exhausted him soon and within five to six years, he became a ghost of his former self. He was taken to Vellore

hospital, where he was told that he was suffering from "a heart ailment" and should immediately fly to the United States for treatment. He could not afford the trip, so after a weary two-months, the lad returned to his village.

A friend who suspected it to be the result of black magic, took him to a muslim *hakim* (medicine man) who confirmed his suspicions. The old man noted the names of the boy's parents, and then sent the boy home. Meditating on the names, the old eyes sparkled with wisdom. "There was a tailor in the youth's village," he began, "who loved this boy's elder sister." The tailor was apparently beaten up by the girl's family, since he had 'dared' to proposition a girl belonging to a higher caste. Not able to bear his humiliation, the tailor committed suicide. "Before his death, he ate a mantra-filled sheep's heart and cursed the family with chest afflictions," the hakim said, with an air of finality.

"Six months after the tailor's suicide, his sweetheart died of a mysterious heart ailment. Another three months and her parents too died of a similar sickness. "The boy is also suffering from chest trouble and I give him only 12 years and 9 months to live," the hakim solemnly announced.

At the relative's insistence, the hakim agreed to help the boy and demanded Rs. 100 as his fees. The relatives, who had already spent Rs. 50,000 on various unsuccessful treatments, wearily agreed. The hakim gave the relatives a talisman, two leaves, flowers, one coconut, turmeric (haldi), kumkum and anjan, with instructions to place the talisman under the youth's bed. The leaves, flowers, kajal, haldi and kumkum were to be mixed in warm water, in which the youth was to bathe before sunrise.

In his house, the ailing youth would sleep fitfully and suddenly shout out, as though in a trance: "What can the hakim do? I've already taken three lives. Just watch what happens at 12 o'clock tomorrow." When the talisman was placed under the boy's pillow, he resisted, but was overpowered. It was even more difficult to get him to bathe in the 'enchanted' water. The first mugful that splashed over him tore a scream from his throat as though he was being tortured with red-hot tongs. After that he was enveloped in a cloud of pungent-smelling smoke,

which he was forced to inhale. The whole day and part of the night the boy kept screaming abuse and threats like "Just you wait till 12 o'clock. . ." drifting off into a troubled sleep well past midnight.

The next morning he woke up and in a normal voice asked for milk. He hungrily drank a few pints. Then he ran out of his room, scrambled up the roof and jumped off it. His frightened relatives picked up the injured, unconscious youth and placed him gingerly on the bed. He came to and then fell asleep almost immediately. Luckily, his bruises were not serious and when he woke up at about 12 noon he was normal. The 'boy' is now 30 years old and totally sane. The incident took place eight years ago.

This case obviously appears to be one associated with mental sickness. The trauma of the deaths in family unhinged the boy's impressionable mind and what was really hysteria, was put down to 'possession'. It could also have meant a more serious mental affliction like schizophrenia or acute mental depression, which, in this case, got cured without medical aid because it may have been in its initial stages, the powerful 'suggestion' of the exorcism rituals convincing him of its curative powers.

Gods versus Ghosts

There is a difference between merely commanding chathans (spirits of the netherworld) and befriending obliging gods, explain devout Malayali Hindus. The legend in Nambudiri circles about Kallur Nambudiripad's ancestor, is an ideal example of this belief. The Kallur predecessor, a Tantric devoted to the deity of the famous Meenakshi temple at Madurai, was believed to have direct access to the temple goddess. Once, when the King of Madurai demanded proof of this 'divine' rapport, the priest is said to have stood outside the temple one night, in the presence of the King, and called out to 'her' three times. Promptly from within came the response "Enna?" (Yes?) The terrified king secretly resolved to behead the Nambudiri. But the wily priest. having got wind of the plot, packed his belongings and fled to his native Kerala.

A friend of the Nambudiri was, on the other hand, known to have had power over chathanas. He once invited the Nambudiri to his daughter's wedding. The lamps alongside the path to the house, were said to have been held aloft by ghosts, so that, to the observer, they seemed to be suspended in mid-air. The moment the Nambudiri stepped in, it is said, the lamps collapsed in a heap on the floor. "Keep them in the air," commanded the host. The lamps rose ruefully, hovered uncertainly, and fell again with a crash the moment the Nambudiri put his foot on the threshold. The host humbly requested the Nambudiri to wait outside till the *muhurtham* of the wedding was over. This was not the only confrontation that night between gods and ghosts. After dinner, the male invitees sat around, exchanging gossip over paan. The host called out to his invisible servants for a spittoon, but the imps were in no mood for work. Pat came their irritated response, "We took an oath to serve you, yes, but not to undertake your dirty work!" On the other hand, when the Nambudiri wondered aloud where he could spit out the tobacco, two lovely arms covered with bangles materialized. They gracefully carried a golden spittoon to the Nambudiri. The Nambudiri spat in it and the arms and spittoon disappeared. "That was Meenakshi, the Mother, she always sees to my needs," the Nambudiri pompously declared to his open-mouthed host.

Trapped chathans buried underground in pots can also wreak havoc, if released by a black magician with the appropriate mantras. They are generally believed to be the black magician's emissaries of destruction—bringing ill-luck and disease to people. Independent chathans are also said to cause trouble in a household. The ancestral home of a Nambudiri family near Ollur in Kerala was haunted for years. When perfectly healthy members of the family began to sicken and die, the male members decided to appease the spirits. The spirits demanded a high price—a human sacrifice. Since none of the family could be forced to oblige, one brave male member volunteered to undertake the task. He had his ritual bath after which he laid his head dutifully under the executioner's chopper. The sacrifice was accepted and the present generation claims to have been 'cleansed' of the spirits since then.

Chathans are feared for their wicked natures. A child caught at mischief can be reprimanded and even spanked, but what does one do with invisible tricksters? Chathans are believed to haunt houses and make nervous wrecks of people. Planting dung in the food, cropping the hair of somnambulant victims, throwing boulders onto roof-tops, pushing a sleeping inmate out of his bed—all these have been frequently 'reported' by house-holders. As with the oddiyan phenomenon, almost every family that I met, had a chathan experience to relate.

Shangooman, the old man mentioned earlier, boasted of his one and only Kuttichathan visitation. Kuttichathan is supposed to be the undisputed leader of all chathans. "This happened when I was a young man," he began. Suddenly one night, I felt a weight on my chest. I opened my eyes and what did I see but this black and flabby dwarf, with long, plaited tresses, trying to strangle me. I struggled with him and he fell with a plop as though he were a blob of jelly."

The Kuttichathan phenomenon has a background. Kuttichathan was supposed to be a dwarfed peasant (just over a metre high) who lost a little finger while harvesting his crops with a scythe. The fellow died soon after and since he had died in his prime, his soul was believed to be restless and began haunting people—harrassing them with unwholesome tricks. He does this to this day, and he has achieved a status any ghoul would envy—he is feared and propitiated by special pujas, involving the killing of a cock and splashing its blood over a stone representing the spirit. He has also been declared the King of all chathans. When he materializes, he looks much the same as he did on his day of death, complete with missing finger and plaited hair.

Kuttichathan is well-known for his various activities. People claim to have seen things being thrown about by 'invisible' hands. Cases of dung being put in the food, someone's hair being cropped, a roof being pelted with rocks, all apparently done by unseen hands, have convinced the stoutest non-believer. These kind of incidents are obviously nothing but the work of schizophrenics or mentally deranged persons. The culprit does these things secretly—generally at night and is himself not 'aware' of his actions. A harrowing experience or melancholia can turn a

person into a schizophrenic. What such a person needs is psychiatric help.

Dr. Abraham Kovoor, the Sinhalese psychiatrist, claimed to have cured many such cases by hetero-suggestive talk, after putting the person into a hypnotic state. He elicited "solemn promises" from the culprits never to indulge in such tricks again. All the persons were mentally disturbed. Those who believe in 'haunted' houses succumb easily to gossip and superstition. They are convinced of the existence of ghosts. When they believe that their houses are haunted, they live in fear, and attribute all unexplicable happenings to the haunting ghost. Their fear of and belief in spirits can cause them to hallucinate and because of this, no value can be attached to their claims.

The belief in demons and ghosts is really a result of the impression death makes on the living. Ghouls and spirits, man assumes, are inhabitants of the world into which a man is initiated after death. Since death is horrible, so must be the other world. But even this world is better than a state of lifelessness, since the concept of ghouls and ghosts also presupposes life—even though in a different form. Man cannot visualize 'nothingness', nor has he any desire to do so. Belief in the existence of spirits signifies a means of escaping the implications of death.

Rustic witchdoctors in Kerala do not have to conjure up Kuttichathan to curse or cure anyone. Other mantras and methods are as adequate and dramatic. Near Trichur, in a blacksmith's village, a young harijan, feared and respected as the village witchdoctor regaled us with a performance of colourful exorcism rituals—involving Kali—outside his match-box sized hut.

He drew a Tantric design with rangoli on the mud floor and put a minuscule Kali image in the centre. Subsequently, he placed a rusted dagger in his mouth and with the air of a skilled carpenter, hammered at it with a piece of wood. When it was appropriately in, he gurgled gutturally and then proceeded to tug at it dramatically. When the much suffering dagger was finally out, he nicked his forehead and arms with its point, drawing blood as an 'offering'. Then he began shuddering spasmodically. rather like an epileptic, and began to mutter. "He

speaks numerous languages, when in a trance," whispered his P.R.O. The 'foreign' language at that moment, turned out to be Tamil! Sensing our disappointment, the 'witchdoctor' reeled off something in broken English that sounded like "Yes, please, thank you." It was at that stage, the P.R.O. informed us, that the young man cured the 'possessed'. He was telling the truth, because it was about then that the giggling crowd of villagers began melting into the distance, leaving only two open-mouthed witnesses—us—in attendance! "Come back this evening, and I will show you how I dance on a bed of nails and flog patients," boasted the accomplished performer. We left with the conviction that the so-called genuine rituals of the village would not be very different from the parody we had just witnessed.

A *velchapad* is a deeply respected sub-priest of the village. He wears bells and dances outside the temple till he goes into a trance. Self-flagellation and inflicting wounds on one's body with a sword was, at one stage, an important velchapad ritual. This is a kind of penance performed for sins committed. For a monetary consideration, a velchapad would also become a scapegoat for another person—suffering physical torture on his behalf, in this way absolving the original sinner of his misdeeds.

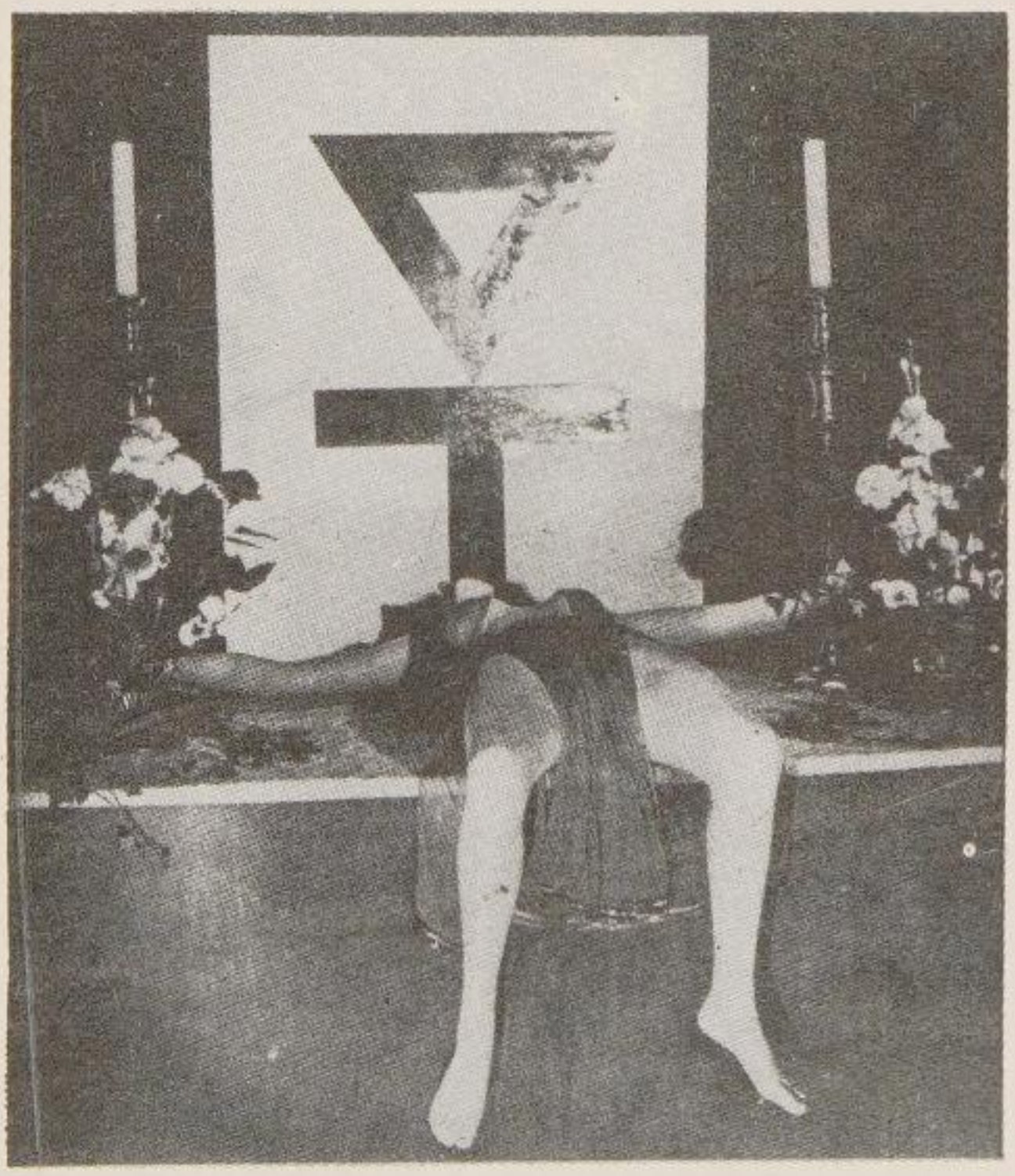
The Nambudiris of Kerala, being the highest class of priests, are totally 'vegetarian' in their rituals, in that neither blood nor flesh has anything to do with their rituals or eating habits. Coconut, flowers and *gurudi* (a liquid preparation made with lime and turmeric) are substitute offerings for flesh and blood, even in the worship of Kali. The significance of blood as an offering is emphasized by the fact that even in its absence, imitation blood is used.

The Chathan Seva Samaj at Antikad, Kerala, was pointed out by many devil-fearing people, to be the place where Kuttichathan was trapped and used by the priests of the Chathan temple for sorcery. Our sojourn to the Chathan Samaj brought us to a sprawling bungalow and a beautifully carved little temple on the ground floor, dedicated to Shiva's son Kartikeya, who is considered to be a sort of a Chathan overlord being served by even Kuttichathan.

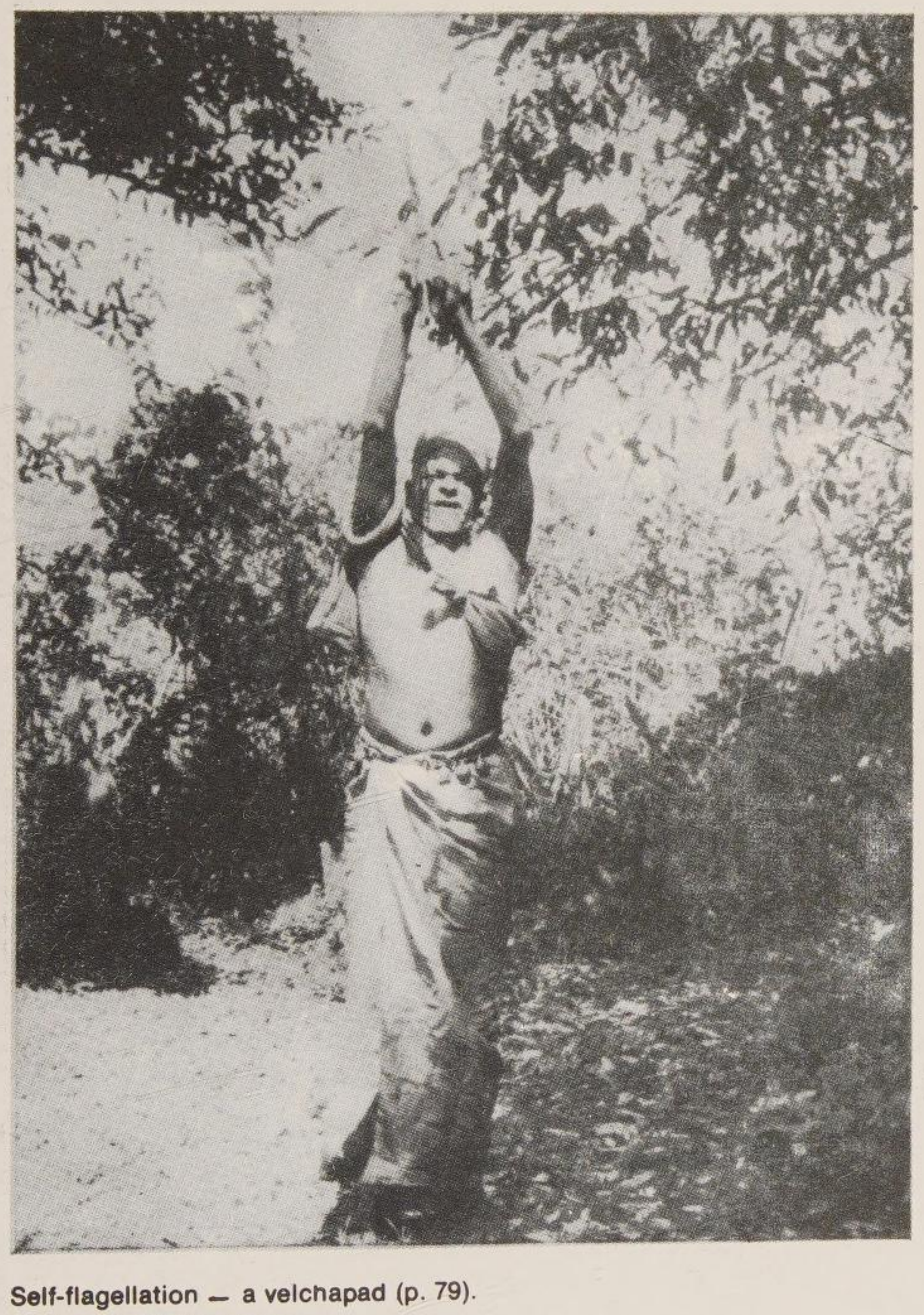
The pot-bellied, reticent priests denied any connection with the practice of witchcraft or chathan activities, but claimed to have cured afflicted people. They were not keen to divulge cases and after *darshan* of the chathan god, we were gently though firmly shown the door. The mystery of their religion remained locked within the fancy gates of the palatial building, belonging to the chief priest, who is reputed to have become rich at the expense of his poor and gullible clientele.

Blood sacrifice in tantra and non-tantric black magic rituals (p. 31).
(Photograph: T.R. Padmanabhan)

Wax representation of the Virgin, placed for sacrifice in the black mass (p. 48).



Harijan witchdoctor of rustic Kerala (p. 78).
(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar).



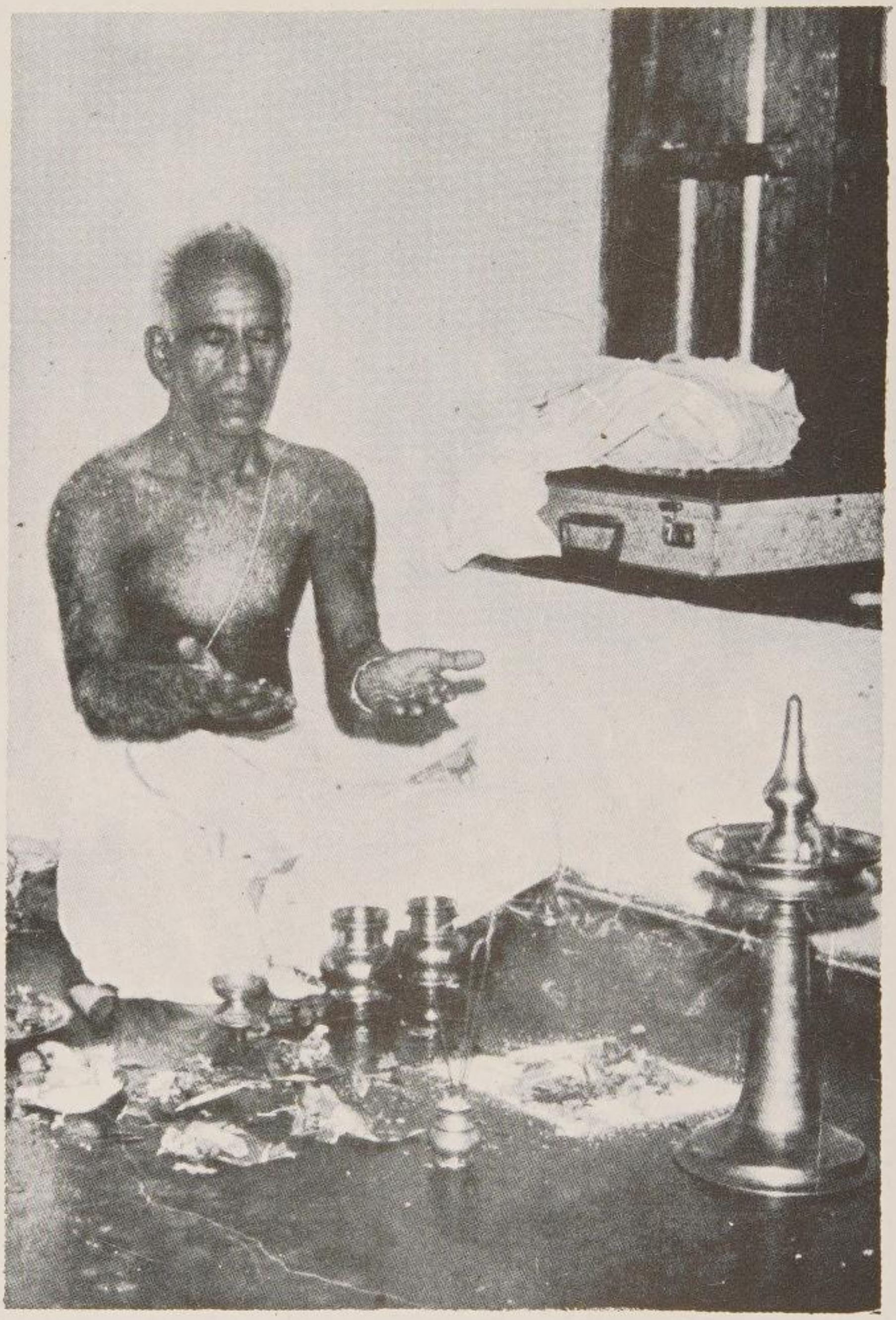
Self-flagellation — a velchapad (p. 79).
(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar)

A velchapad curing a victim of possession by thrashing her (p. 79).

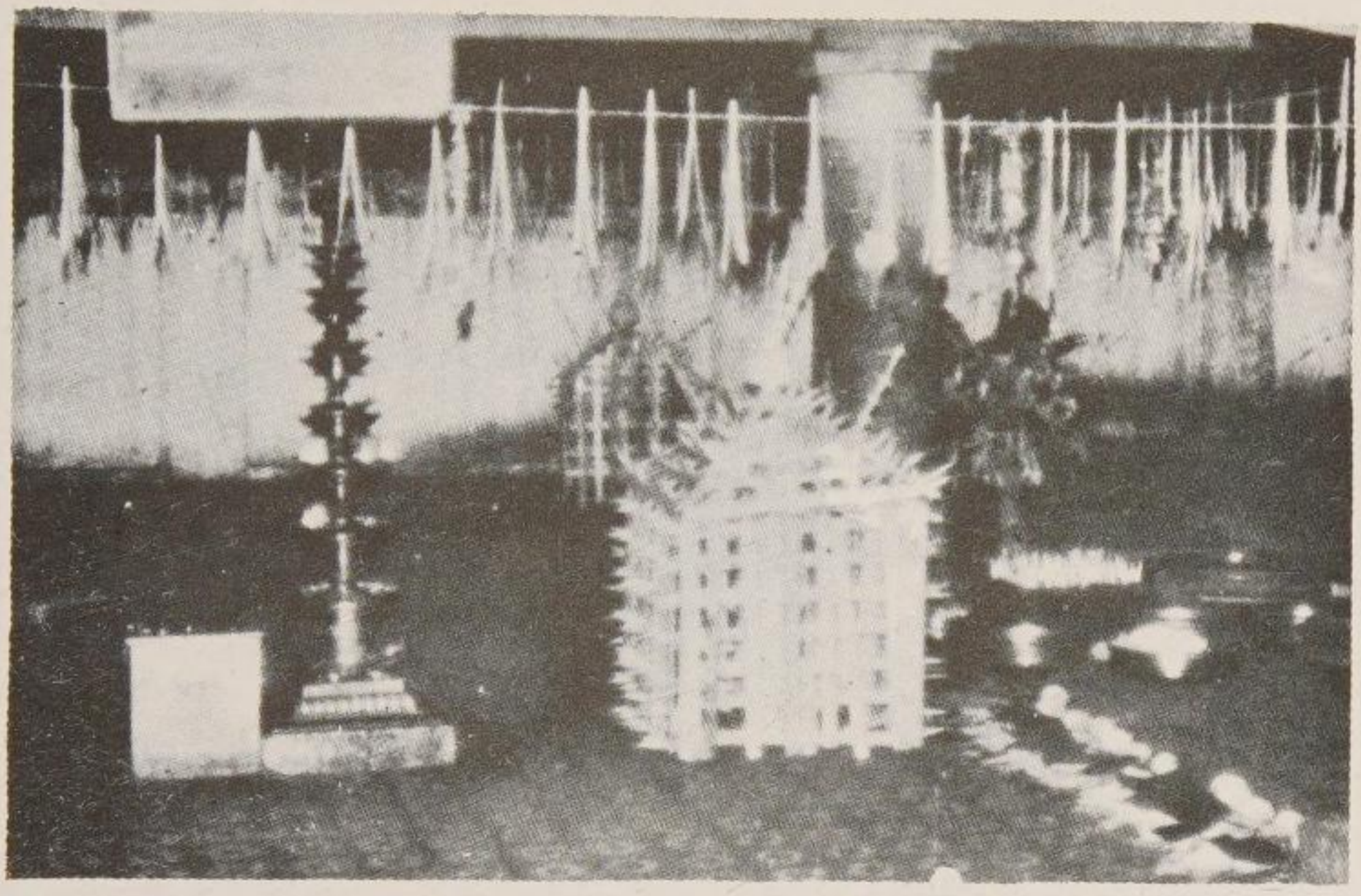
(Photograph: T.R. Padmanabhan)

An astrologer 'diagnosing' problems for which, the Namboodiri will find a solution (p. 97).

(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar)



Namboodiri during exorcism ritual (p. 97).
(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar)



Inner sanctum of Kira Kava (Kali temple) where the gurudi ritual is held. The flower- and bamboo-bedecked object represents a temple of Kali (p. 89).

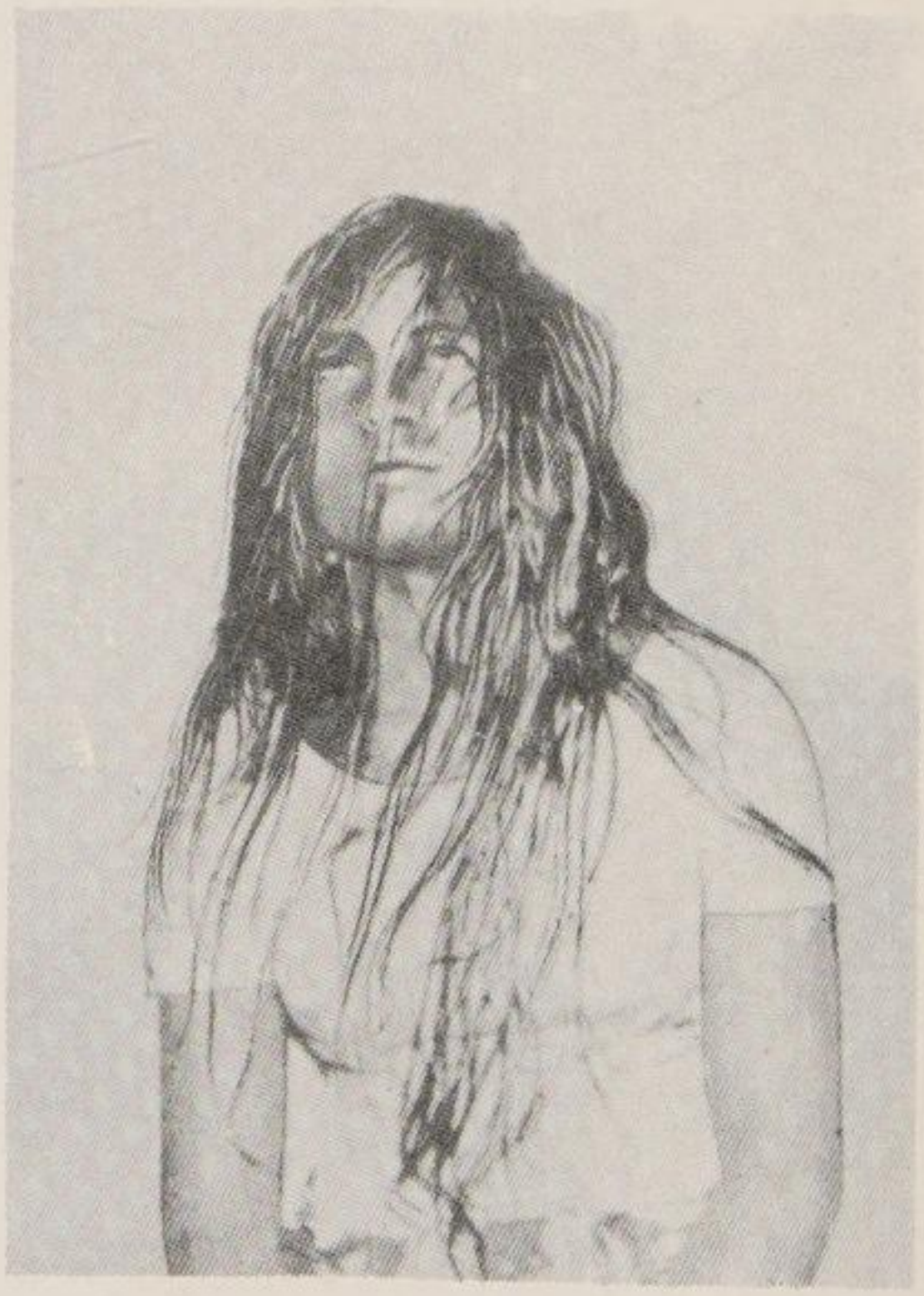
(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar)

Gulbarga: Bhanamati 'victim' undergoing exorcism (p. 131).

(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar)

Exorcism frenzy at Chottanikara (p. 133).
(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar)

14-year-old Vasantha, the youngest patient at Chottanikara, in a trance (p. 134).
(Photograph: T.R. Arun Kumar)



12 The Aftermath of a Curse: Case Histories

So far, we have discussed the rituals of witchcraft—both black and white. But what happens to the victim? I came across a number of cases in Kerala and Maharashtra, of people who claimed to have been bewitched, and talked about the effects this has had on them. Most of what they said corresponds to popular beliefs.

Mr. G., a bank employee in Fort area, Bombay, talked of his "agonizing experience", which he felt was the result of black magic aimed at destroying his family. The spirit conjured through those rites was, he felt, still hovering around them because his wife, the chief victim, was still disturbed in her sleep. G. had spent a tremendous amount of money travelling to and from his native place in Kerala for the Tantric exorcism pujas aimed at ridding her of the 'curse'. G's story is tragic in that it has created a kind of fear psychosis in both him and his wife.

A senior officer in the bank now, G. had a tough time struggling up the corporate ladder. He was efficient in his work but seemed to have stagnated in his low-paid position. His superior officers were happy with him, and he could not complain of enmity with any of his colleagues. So, like a typical Keralite, he consulted his family astrologer, who proposed a detailed reading of the horoscope. This process of reading the horoscope, or the *Ashtamangalaya* as it is known, took seven days. The idea was to study his stars, search for some snag and then complete the ritual with a puja to propitiate the offended deity. In case there was a spirit involved, an exorcism puja involving the in-

vocation and imprisonment of the spirit in a metal or wooden deity could also be performed.

One afternoon, 15 to 20 days after the Ashtamangalaya, his wife, who was napping in the drawing room of their Andheri flat was rudely woken. She saw a human form materialize before her. It was a man, between 30 to 40 years in age, 5' 5" in height, totally black in colour except for his gleaming white teeth. The apparition began advancing menacingly towards her. She was too petrified to move. Just as he reached out for her throat, she screamed "Krishna!"—her family deity's name. At the same time she managed to grasp a handful of vibhuti (holy ash) from the puja *thali* (tray) lying within reach and throw it at the hideous figure. It dissolved immediately. "It could not be a dream because she was wide awake, it couldn't be her imagination either because she is not given to hallucinations," explained G., "also it couldn't be someone's or something's shadow, because the spot where it materialized gets no sun at that point in the afternoon. Besides, it was too real and dramatic for the incident to have been purely a figment of her imagination," he concluded. We were sitting in his house at precisely the time, in the afternoon, when the creature had materialised To prove his point, he took me to the dingy corner where it had "appeared". He was right. There was no sun there, nor any stains or black marks that might have been mistaken for the phantom. Besides, G. insisted, countering my subtle suggestion, his wife did not have an over-stressed psyche.

Anyhow, after that incident, the family began missing things from locked cupboards, including Rs. 200 in cash.

More or less at the same time, in distant Kerala, G.'s businessman nephew also underwent a similar experience. One morning a stranger came to his shop and asked for Rs. 100. The boy generously gave it to him, without any hesitation or premonition of impending disaster. By 7.30 p.m. that same day, the nephew fell sick with high temperature. "What the boy didn't realize was that giving any of his possessions to a total stranger was dangerous. Black magic succeeds if incantations are muttered over something belonging to the intended victim," G. said. Somehow the ailing lad reached home and flopped on the bed. He

remained "like a corpse" for the next four days. His frightened mother called the family priest and got a puja done. "On the fourth day of the incident," continued G., "a kangaroo-like beast materialised in the sick boy's room and tried to strangle him. The priest heard the boy's terror-stricken cries and appeared just in time to drive the apparition off with powerful mantras."

On receiving news of his nephew's delirious condition, G's belief that this was a planned vengeance further crystallized.

The family priest conducted the Ganapati and the Sudarshan *homums* as the exorcism pujas. Before concluding the Sudarshan homum, G. was sprinkled with water 'sanctified' by mantras. He says that he went into a semi-conscious state. He remembers very little of what transpired except stray questions and answers like: "What are you here for?" "I'm here to destroy this family." He also remembers attempting to assault the priest and being forcibly held in one place. Mr. M., the affluent priest's secretary, who was present at the puja, nodded confirmation.

"I remember experiencing hatred and revulsion during the puja," says G, "particularly during the afternoon session."

In order to be able to concentrate better, G. decided to go through with the remaining pujas in rural Kerala, away from the noise of the metropolis. At the time of writing, his wife and nephew are not yet completely cured and the pujas continue. G. strongly believes that this phenomenon is purely supernatural. The suggestion that his nephew might have been a victim of delirium or that his wife may have been subject to mental stress is unacceptable to him. In neither case was a doctor or a psychiatrist consulted.

The more gruesome the magician's intention, the deadlier is the effect, goes the belief. A bank in Coimbatore was once believed to be cursed. Each one of the regional managers, young men most of them, had mysteriously sickened and died. A Mr. M. was appointed manager and sent to the Coimbatore branch. His suspicions were soon aroused, and he sent for his priest. The priest prayed and then began digging under the manager's chair. A skull and two human bones were discovered and destroyed. The priests held prayers and sprinkled the place with holy water.

Apparently, no problem was subsequently reported in the bank. The possibility of a decaying corpse polluting the air and causing sickness and death was never considered. This explanation may sound far-fetched, but not as incredible as the obscurantist explanation offered. Whose skull it was that was allegedly causing all the trouble, and under what circumstances it came to be there, was not even investigated.

One of the more well-known cases of witchcraft in Kerala, was the one that involved Ammachi, wife of a Raja of Travancore. According to popular belief, she was driven insane by mantras. An exorcism puja was undertaken twelve days after she had been affected. This resulted in the local storekeeper's son losing his head. It came to be known that the young man had desired Ammachi and to attract her, had dabbled in black magic. The local inhabitants believe that if a puja had not been held to counteract the spell, the youth might have succeeded in his aim, as "there are spells so powerful, that they can force an individual to lose his reason and surrender himself to the black magician's lust." Ammachi might have been a psychic case—but the family refused to accept such a 'mundane' explanation, as it lacked the drama appropriate to a woman in her condition.

In Tholanur, near Cochin in south Kerala, there is a widespread fear of a particular community of fisherfolk. It is believed that they are able to cause a person to hallucinate and thereby kill him. A piece of wood can be made to look like a fish and this, when picked up by the tempted passerby, can kill him with the force of its inherent evil. There is no explanation offered as to how the hallucination is produced. It seems more a case of hypnotism or auto-suggestion.[1] Another type of black magic is exemplified in the following case.

A Malayalee taxi plier in Khar, Bombay, claims to have undergone a terrifying experience. The mental and monetary condition of this well-to-do owner of three taxis, deteriorated so much because of the curse that he believed plagued him, that he sold off his possessions and his fashionable flat at Marine Lines in Bombay (where he lived before he came to Khar) and almost committed suicide.

A normally peaceful man, he had lost control over himself and become extremely depressed and malevolent. He began to lust after his own daughter and forced the helpless girl to sleep next to him. Though, thanks to his wife's interference, he never attempted intercourse he did make obscene overtures to the girl. He beat his wife mercilessly whenever she protested.

Also, he often complained of hearing strange noises coming from the kitchen sink. When his condition became intolerable, specially after his attempt at suicide, a Nambudiri was asked to perform a puja and investigate whether there was any black magic involved. The Nambudiri, after chanting incantations and meditating on the problem, moved towards the sink and began digging the floor beneath it. A rotting human skull and bones were finally unearthed. The man felt immediate relief and his pseudo-personality disappeared.

That night he dreamt that the person responsible for the black magic—a woman—had expired and was covered with numerous mustard seeds, each one, according to Nambudiri Tantra, symbolizing a year to be spent in hell. He could not see the woman's face, but soon after, a telegram arrived, announcing the mysterious death of his sister. The sister, a spinster, had never displayed any active hostility towards him or his family, but the fact that she had died a few days after his peculiar dream convinced him that she was the one responsible for his predicament, and was now probably languishing in hell because of the spell that had boomeranged on her. In this case, the magician's 'tools' — the skull and bones were buried in the belief that as they gradually rotted, the victim's mental condition would simultaneously degenerate.

True to the maxim, an eye for an eye—or more aptly, a soul for a soul—a death curse, if it is unsuccessful, rebounds and kills the black magician. Here, the woman who had supposedly tried to barter her own brother's soul to the 'devil', had to pay for the failure of the curse, with her own soul. As mentioned earlier, this maxim also applies to the black magician who has successfully harmed someone. Ultimately, maybe, at the tail end of his life, or whenever his control over spirits has lessened, it is believed that he will pay for his sins in a terrible way.

Mangalore offers a colourful folklore of witchcraft, spirit possession and exorcism.

One humorous story narrated by the local inhabitants of Kullai village was about a Catholic, who, with devilish delight, began irreverently throwing refuse at a crude 'preta' temple, erected by the local Hindu inhabitants. The spirit warned him of the consequences of this blasphemy, but the man paid no heed. One day, enraged, the invisible preta boxed him on the back. As of that moment, the man started bloating. In a matter of minutes he grew such an outsized stomach that his relatives had to put him into hospital. Water, that had collected mysteriously in his belly had to be pumped out to bring him back to normal.

In Perambur, a temple was built for a demi-god or *shaitan* as the semi-literate local Christians refer to it. The area was a building site and innocent passers-by often underwent traumatic deaths. They were crushed under the gigantic crane operating in the area in what appeared to be accidents. When the deaths became too many and too regular to be considered accidents. people began to say that it was the demigod who was responsible. A Hindu priest, it is said, trapped the spirit and destroyed the temple, ridding the people of the ghostly pest.

The tales of Perambur do not end here. Frederick, a thirty-two-year-old electrician hailing from Perambur, tells of a hair-raising incident of his youth, when he helplessly watched two young girls being drowned in a pond in his compound by an unseen force, which he is certain was none other than a malevolent water spirit—said to be a common phenomenon in Mangalore. That night, while bathing, he remembers hearing footsteps near the bathroom. But when he repeatedly demanded to know the identity of the intruder, he got no reply. He then personally investigated the area around the bathroom, but in vain. However, he says, the invisible presence was beside him while he was searching because he could hear heavy breathing and footsteps keeping pace with him. Frederick almost fainted with fright, but somehow managed to keep his wits about him and retired for the night. The next day, a priest was called to rid the place of what the household was certain was a malevolent spirit. Jesus, Mary and the Holy Angels were invoked, while the priest sprinkl-

ed 'holy' water all over the house. Apparently, the witchcraft involved was undone, for no other incidents were reported thereafter.

In Mangalore too, the Christians believe that witchcraft, specially black magic, is practised only by Hindus and Muslims. It is said that a Christian wanting to dabble in it will not go to a Christian priest, nor indulge in it himself. He will consult a Muslim or a Hindu mantric and get things done through him. Of course, there are always those Christians who want to train themselves in the 'art', but for that, says Frederick emphatically, echoing Father V's point, he has to renounce Christ. Our experience with the Goan Christians, however has proved the contrary. That community believes in the peaceful coexistence of Christ and the devil and hence in placating both.

One of the most incredible stories we heard about Hindu witchcraft was from a retired college professor settled in Kerala. What was amazing was the highly educated professor's total belief in witchcraft and his faith in the powers of the Chottanikara temple, the famous 'house of exorcism', which, he claimed, cured him of the effects of black magic. M.K.B. is a graduate of the prestigious Loyola College, Madras, and an ex-lecturer of Madras University. "You won't believe it," he said, "I can see you're sceptical, like most people, but I suppose you have to experience it yourself, before you can believe in the supernatural. There isn't any other way I can convince you." He shrugged resignedly. M.K.B.'s defensive attitude was indicative of the cynicism with which he had been regarded by his colleagues. "Perhaps the fact that I am well-educated makes it sound even more ridiculous to the sceptic," he said, sighing for all the world like a misunderstood messiah.

His story sounds very much like a miracle straight out of religious scriptures. He was plagued by an inexplicable sickness when he was a bright young research scholar at Madras University. He suddenly began losing concentration in his work. His heart began "palpitating as though it were about to burst", and he began swooning frequently. His doctor, however, pronounced him physically fit. The doctor's optimism did not help boost his morale, nor did it stop the sudden mushrooming of ailments

in the family. His mother mysteriously fell ill and his wife took to bed with a painful sore. A tiny growth on her finger reduced her to a mass of suffering flesh. When doctors could not diagnose either patient's problems, mantravadis and astrologers were called in, and they declared all the 'incidents' to be the accumulated result of black magic mantras manipulated by illwishers.

An agnostic initially, M.K.B. was converted when he discovered that his wife's pain disappeared completely during the mantravadi's chanting. After the mantravadi's departure, the wife had a renewed attack of pain. "It was almost as though a mischievous presence was being held in abeyance by the powerful mantras—but returned with all its evil force as soon as the mantravadi was out of the house." Because of his intense suffering, he turned to mysticism.

The family visited some of the major temples of the South like Guruvayoor, but all in vain. The Lord was implacable. Someone suggested the Chottanikara temple in Ernakulam, where people suffering from psychological or other inexplicable disorders were reputed to have been cured. M.K.B. rationalized that since their respective illnesses could not be cured by doctors, trying yet another temple could not harm them. A few days before he decided to leave for the temple, he said, his clothes began mysteriously catching fire and one morning his wife woke up to find her long hair cropped. As though that was not enough, the unhappy woman's sore burst and pus flowed unabated despite medical treatment.

This made up M.K.B.'S mind. A visit to the exorcism temple was finalized. They trudged the distance to Chottanikara on foot. At the temple, an old devotee of the temple goddess took them under his wing. The old man was said to be so close to 'Chottanikara Amma'—the temple deity—that she even bantered with him light-heartedly. "*Patari* (old man)," she used to say, during one of her special 'darshans' to him, "I'm feeling tired because of over-work, and so I'm going to sleep." Obviously, no one thought of paying the poor Amma over-time for services rendered.

M.K.B. and his wife remained voluntarily imprisoned in the temple compound for three years, not once stepping out. They worshipped the deity and participated in all the rituals of the temple under the guidance of the old man. When his wife menstruated, she would stay away from the temple proper (orthodox Hindus believe a woman is 'impure' during her periods, menstrual blood being considered polluting) and would stay in a pujari's hut in the compound.

At the second temple, within the Chottanikara premises, which is known as the Kira Kava, or Kali temple, they participated in the *Gurudi puja*, undertaken to exorcize all evil spirits from human bodies. This they did in the evening, subsequent to exorcism pujas at the main temple. Gurudi, a turmeric and lime substitute for blood, was the *prasadam* of the temple. Surprisingly, what the doctors could not do, the gurudi accomplished. When gurudi was poured over the wife's finger, it began to heal rapidly, and within two-and-a-half months, the diseased tip of the index finger dropped off. Another week and the finger was completely healed.

M.K.B. argues. "The sceptic would say that turmeric has antiseptic properties, and that it was natural for the finger to heal. Actually, the gurudi was made under very unhygienic conditions with unclean hands being dipped into it constantly, yet my wife was healed. How do you account for that?" It was certainly the goddess who was ridding them of the effects of black magic, he says. What reaffirmed his faith in the goddess was an incident that took place soon after his wife's 'treatment'.

During one of the propitiatory pujas, he had promised the devi a gold ring, if she healed his wife's finger. Subsequently he forgot about the 'promise'. A few days later, when he opened the door to their lodgings, he discovered "a garland of golden rings lying on the ground, resembling a golden bunch of grapes".

The 'golden' rings were of an unusual metal which was malleable and easily crushed. They reminded him of his promise to the goddess and he felt thoroughly ashamed. He was convinced that this was nothing short of a 'divine' reminder from Her. At that very moment, he took whatever little gold was left with his wife and had it smelted into a ring for the goddess.

They distributed some of the other rings as 'prasadam' to two other Chottanikara 'patients'. The act, however well-intentioned, was indiscreet on M.K.B.'s part, because that particular night the devi chided him in his dream. "What I bestow upon my devotees is not to be given away," she scolded. "Since you did that, I am withdrawing all the rings, including those in your possession." Sure enough, M.K.B. could not find the rings the following day, and, mysteriously, nor could his friends.

His wife, after one of her trances (the devi had been 'visiting' her regularly) advised M.K.B. to fetch Narayana Namboodiripad --a high priest of the temple—to undertake certain pujas and rituals. "Narayana Namboodiripad's pujas had a special significance", explained M.K.B. "He is a prominent exorcist of Kerala." Namboodiripad performed the particular prayers. This continued for the three years that they stayed at the temple, and little by little, "with the devi's blessing," both of them were cured. Also, since they were reduced to absolute penury, the devi "blessed" them with a little capital, loaned to them by a relative. With that they bought two shops in Broadway, Ernakulam, "both of which would today sell for a few lakhs of rupees". They are thus very comfortably off. A building, which they had bought with the profits that their small business had brought them, fetched them Rs. three lakhs when they sold it. "I was able to educate my children well which I could not have earlier, since I was always in debt. It is all thanks to the Mother," M.K.B. concluded emotionally.

His children are very well-educated—some of them scientists settled in the United States, involved in prestigious projects. "My children, like me, were initially agnostic, but after our experience are today believers in the powers of the deity."

Prasadam is regularly posted to his scientist daughter in the States. "My wife and I now visit the temple every year. All of us are indebted to the Mother for life," he adds with finality—his unquestioning faith putting the lid on any further arguments.

A typical aspect of exorcism, namely, the act of prophesying is noticeable here. While battling black magic and evil spirits, a deity is invoked, (the Chottanikara Amma in this case) who invariably 'possesses' the victim (in some cases, it is the priest).

During that time the 'patient' enters a state of 'spiritual frenzy' and in this state, he or she is said to utter the word of God. Victims generally babble during this phase and this is taken as the 'deity's instructions'. In this case, M.K.B.'s wife was the 'medium' through which the devi expressed her opinions.

13 The Antidote

Getting rid of a curse needs as much know-how and artistry as 'planting' one. Black magicians inevitably know the remedy for their own spells, so, for a practitioner, white and black magic generally go hand in hand. Mantrics and tantrics indulge basically in white magic, but when money beckons in the form of a wealthy client, the temptation is almost always irresistable.

With the unwavering public belief in witchcraft, exorcists in the West Coast region are flourishing. Each has his own method of 'battling' the supernatural, though here too the basic weapon is the same—i.e. mantras invoking god's name. Evil is got rid of by 'transferring' it from the victim to another object. This transference of evil is a fundamental aspect of exorcism which is practiced in most primitive cultures of the world. Through the power of mantras, the evil spirit is induced into either objects such as a lemon, or metal images of a deity—which are then buried or destroyed, in this way destroying the spirit too.

Hindu

Sakhare senior of Khopoli, stabs seven lemons with seven pins each in cases of spirit possession. Subsequently, muttering the name of the spirit involved (which the spirit itself has communicated to him during one of their 'conversations') he brings each of the lemons in contact with the different parts of the body, in this way drawing out the spirit or spirits, after which the lemons are buried in a graveyard. The spirits are then said to be trapped in those lemons.

The 'trapping' of the spirit is very similar to the rituals performed by white magicians and exorcists in Kerala. During the puja, when invoking a particular deity, generally Durga, the

spirit is 'enticed' into metal images of the goddess by means of mantras and Tantric gestures. These ironically resemble the nimble mudras of Kathakali, specially that of a lover beckoning seductively to his companion. After the *avahan* (literally translated as 'the coming') is complete, the metal images, said to contain the spirits, are nailed to a tree, or thrown into a river or sea, ridding the person forever of the 'menace'.

'Nailing' of a spirit is also practised at the Chottanikara temple in Ernakulam, where the possessed, after being relieved of the spirit, drives, with his forehead, a six-inch nail into an antiquated tree in the temple compound. One tree dried up as a result of this. But nails driven into it for any reason would have had the same effect. The one now being used is bristling with thick nails, smeared with kumkum and some have red rags attached to their heads. It is believed that by pulling a nail out of the trunk one would release the spirit and risk being possessed oneself. The practice of 'nailing' spirits has also been discovered by anthropologists in some tribes of Africa. The belief behind the practice is the same as that at the Chottanikara.

We watched Sakhare perform an exorcism on a terrified woman. His method differed from the one described above. I suppose the method varies with the severity of the condition. He mumbled Kali's prayers and in her name sprinkled rice and vibhuti gathered from incense sticks, all around the victim, ordering the spirit to quit. Offerings were strictly vegetarian as amongst the Nambudiris of Kerala. Fruits, flowers and coconuts were offered. Animal sacrifices during the rites are taboo.

Sakhare believes that the form of exorcism hardly matters—it is basically the faith of the person that sees him through a crisis. All exorcists are psychologists to a large degree and Sakhare is no exception. This, despite the fact that he has studied only up to the 7th standard.

One rather hair-raising case that he handled, involved a young woman, who was being sexually harrassed by her brother-in-law's ghost. The spirit would appear at night, especially when her husband was on night shift at a factory. It would materialize, grapple with her, threaten to rape her and even go through the motions of doing so. This happened on several nights con-

secutively when he would play at being her husband and demand his conjugal rights. The woman was out of her mind with terror. Later, he began 'possessing' her young son too. Sakhare accepted her case. Through his usual 'talk' with the spirit, he 'discovered' that the brother-in-law, when alive, was jealous of his brother's good fortune and had always envied his domestic bliss. A doctor who had failed to cure the woman was also present at the exorcism, claimed Sakhare. The woman was, of course, cured. The case was very probably one of over-active imagination on the part of a passionate woman, who in the absence of her husband craved sexual satisfaction. Hence the psychological resort to an oversexed 'ghost'.

"All my cases have been successful," Sakhare said with a smugness born of 40 years of professional success. "Yet, all I have is this," he added, moving his hand in a sweeping motion around his dingy, ill-ventilated room. "I am not rich like my brother, but I've had my good moments too. I'm content." His assortment of sons—all educated—voiced their unanimous agreement like a well-rehearsed chorus.

Sakhare's wife, apparently, has her own 'gift'. Whenever they are in doubt about a particular case, they invoke Kali, who obligingly materializes on a patch of kajal, specially smeared for the occasion, on the wife's thumb nail. The vision is hazy, but, according to Sakhare, Kali answers all their questions, through the wife. The man seemed sorry that his wife was not at home, for he was keen to demonstrate the 'miracle'. Here again the phenomenon of prophecy was resorted to—the medium, peculiarly enough, again being a woman.

It is popularly believed that spirits generally possess a body, if they have some worldly desires. They hover on the earthly plane till they achieve their object. This belief is common to the Christians, Muslims and Hindus of the West Coast. Generally, these spirits have no evil intentions, but, like human beings, lust drives them into a state where they would do anything just to acquire what they desire. Surprisingly, says Sakhare, they are generally satisfied with petty, everyday things—like eatables or cloth. In most of the cases of possession that he dealt with, the spirit was satisfied with, say, a kilo of meat, a piece of cloth,

sweets and laddoos. There was an incident where the spirit of an addict even demanded *tambakoo* (tobacco)! This belief is the natural corollary to ascribing human attributes to spirits.

The black magician can be made out by a black mark on his ear and he worships pretas (devils) and not Kali, according to Sakhare. (The latter claim holds no water in the light of the many Kali-worshipping black magicians in Goa and Kerala.) "It is highly dangerous to practice black magic," continued Sakhare. "These *Karva Bhagats* (black magicians) die horrible deaths, but worst of all, their innocent children are also affected. I know of a black magician whose evil rebounded on him in such a way that his children died one after another."

Sakhare only once met his guru, a wandering sadhu, who revealed the secrets of magic to him. "I had to do a lot of tapasya to be able to master mantras," he told us. "Some of my tapasyas lasted for twelve years, and I will continue them as long as I am alive," he concluded, with as much determination as his quavering voice can muster.

As mentioned before, mantric authorities in Kerala, not only have an insight into the mysteries of witchcraft, but have also the power to battle it.

Narayana Namboodiripad, a powerful Tantric of Ernakulam, Cochin district, told me, "We Namboodiris use our power only for the good of the people." Though they know the darkest secrets of witchcraft, they refrain from practising it, for "who wants to go against his very soul and his god?"

Though black magic if studied unflinchingly and with its own brand of perverse devotion, is supposed to bequeath immense power to the devotee in the form of wealth, fame, lustful sex partners and whatever else a person could wish for, the common belief is that it ultimately sells one's soul to the devil. Not only the Namboodiris, but leaders of other religions the world over believe in this 'inexorable law of nature'. Christians call such devotees 'Satan worshippers', while Muslims of the West Coast dub them 'Shaitaan's disciples.'

The mantric exorcists of Kerala are reputed to hail from important families. It is said that the great Parashurama bestowed upon these manas (houses) his magical powers. The manas are

the Kallur Mana, Kattumadam Mana, Kannamangalam Mana, Kavanadu Mana, Surya Kaladi Mana and the Kaladikod Parayas, who later came to be known as harijans. The powers bestowed on these families became hereditary.

Each of these families is said to possess certain *gunas* or qualities, appropriate to their 'caste' and status in society.

Members of the highest caste, (obviously Brahmins) supposed to be blessed with *Sathoguna,* or the virtue of remaining calm, indulge in white witchcraft, which involves healing powers.

Those of the middle ranking caste, said to be possessing the quality of *Rajoguna,* dabble in a more daring form of witchcraft—which is neither entirely white nor totally evil.

Tamoguna implies the 'black' qualities of human nature—rage, lust, etc. Families endowed with such negative forces, generally practise black magic. The lofty Namboodiris firmly believe that the Kaladikod Parayas and other backward caste families have inherited Tamoguna from their ancestors and are mercenaries practising only black magic. Of course, the fact that white magic for the Namboodiris has also become a money-spinning gambit, is conveniently overlooked. That is excusable, they retort, since by indulging in that, they are helping those afflicted as a result of black magic, rather than damning them.

Tribes in Africa also believe in the hereditary power of magic. There too, certain families are believed to possess powers, which are passed on from one generation to another. The institution of witchdoctors for example, in most cases, is hereditary.

Most disturbing incidents in Kerala, such as diseases, broken marriages, unrequited love, sickness, etc., are blamed on a spirit. Even the cure of something as clinical as manic depression which generally necessitates a psychiatrist, involves the necessary discovery of a malignant spirit, the propitiation of the concerned deity and the subsequent exorcism—the entire operation supervised by a Namboodiri.

All Namboodiri families are believed to possess the power of removing or exorcizing evil. I attended one such ritual in Matunga, Bombay.

Narayana Nambudiripad, of the powerful Kallur Mana, the only son to have taken up the profession after his famous father

—the rest of the children having taken up modern professions —invited me to a Mr. Nair's home. I witnessed the procedure which was repeated in my relative's home and which I shall presently describe.

Narayana is a thorough professional. He visits Bombay from his village near Trichur in Kerala almost every month, his air-fare being paid by his well-to-do if slightly paranoid clients. The numerous Malayalees of Bombay, perhaps better able to afford his services than their small-town kinsmen, have thoroughly pampered the priest. He is always over-booked, and to seek an appointment with him, one has to approach his jovial and shrewd secretary months in advance of the stipulated puja. If the fee is suitable and the Nambudiri agrees, the matter reaches Stage Two, where the priest himself consults with the clients.

"It is not only to rid themselves of the effects of black magic, or evil spirits that possess them: my clients also call me to perform pujas for the general well-being of the family, which is as much a preventive as it is a cure against dark forces," said the cherubic priest.

Coming back to the rituals—a Punjabi relative of mine had suffered a broken marriage and wanted to consult the Nambudiri, who, she had heard, performed 'miracles' for his Malayalee disciples. This information had been 'discreetly' passed on to her by his ever-vigilant secretary. She was referred to a qualified astrologer of Matunga, who generally works in collaboration with Nambudiripad. The astrologer took a handful of shells and threw them out like miniature dice. Speculating on the pattern spread out before him, he decided that the client's flat was haunted by a wandering spirit which must be ousted, if peace was to be restored to the family. The presence of the spirit, he announced, was the work of a black magician, or perhaps that of the paramour of the estranged husband. He advised four pujas—each to propitiate a different deity—and the Nambudiri proceeded to perform them in the 'haunted' flat.

All four pujas had to do with the avahan or invoking of the spirit and its trapping into metal images of Durga—the presiding deity who is also the family deity of the Nambudiri.

The first puja was performed just before sunrise. Called the Sudarshan Homum, it is dedicated to Vishnu, the 'Sudarshan' being the celestial weapon of Vishnu. The puja is generally undertaken to combat evil, and also works as a preventive.

Timing is central to the pujas, and the next puja was performed in the afternoon. It is known as the Akhora Homum. A ritual to propitiate Shiva (the 'Akhora' being a Shiva mantra), the purpose and rituals of the puja were similar to that of the Sudarshan Homum.

Next in line was the Ganapati Homum, performed in the evening. Ganapati in Kerala, as in Maharashtra, is worshipped as the god who has the power to remove all obstacles. Last of all, was the Durga puja for peace of mind.

During all the pujas, big mounds of sweet smelling and colourful flowers were piled neatly around four brass lamps which represented the gods who were being propitiated. The sing-song and low-keyed chanting of Sanskrit mantras and the tantric gestures, the flickering lamps in a darkened room and the heady odour of incense sticks and fresh flowers, created an atmosphere pregnant with an overwhelming sense of the mysterious. At the tail end of it all, the Namboodiri, a convincing performer, performed a little *aarti* and distributed prasadam. It all ended at 9:00 p.m., having begun at 5:00 a.m. One marvelled at the Nambudiri's stamina, and also the fact that he went through this tedious ritual almost everyday of his life. But as the man had been trained to do this since his childhood, what may seem a trial of patience for someone else, had become routine for him—a bread winning occupation.

At the end of the aarti, the evil spirits were 'transferred' to silver images of Durga—the reigning goddess of the Kallur household and Nambudiripad kept them with him to bury or 'nail' to a tree.

This avahan or coaxing of the spirit into the Durga image and then its burial is believed to bring salvation to the spirit, said to be wandering and hence again amenable to capture and control by yet another black magician. Tantric rituals during the puja involving the touching of the head, nose, eyes and ears

literally mean, "Deity, you have enhanced sensual powers." This is known as the *dhyanashloka.*

Christian

Father V, a young priest at a Bandra church, is not a reputed exorcist—in fact, he would hesitate to call himself an exorcist at all, because he believes in "scientific explanation" for most unusual happenings. "One could, perhaps, resort to mysticism," he says, "if events are totally inexplicable. It isn't as though spirits do not exist, or exorcism is not a reality. It's just that one has to be cautious about where the rational ends and the mystical begins. Too many cases are hysterical in nature and need a psychiatrist's couch more than an exorcist's broom." Sometimes the exorcists themselves have to do the work of psychiatrists. "We dig into the patient's past and try to win his confidence to find the root cause of the trouble."

As proof he quoted the case history of an 18-year old girl in Bandra. She began behaving like a wild animal—her fingers perpetually hooked into claws. She screamed, growled, bit and did everything in her power to make life hell for her family. To Father V., it seemed more a case of hysteria—part of the girl's trauma of impending womanhood. On her parents' request, he visited her. She spat like a cat and screamed, "I shan't humour you, who are you to bully me?" They had her chained up, like a ferocious dog. When she realized that hysteria didn't move the priest one bit, she tried the game of seduction. She declared she was in love with the priest and desired him passionately. She also talked of hearing voices on the terrace. On the face of it, these were all symptoms of possession, yet the priest was sure that she was absolutely sane. It was more or less a case of auto-suggestion and conditioning, he felt. She had heard or read how possessed people were supposed to behave and had repeated the performance, with amazing typicality. When the priest threatened to beat her, she collapsed. "I am not possessed, father," she confessed. "It's just that my mother has high ambitions for me which I'll never be able to achieve." With that she dissolved into helpless tears—a child unable to come up to the expectations of her parent.

On Father V.'s request, a psychiatrist and some social workers promised to help her. "But more than the child, the mother needed treatment," he said. "Her relentless pushing had given the poor child an inferiority complex."

"Those who are insecure and in need of some psychological support generally seek out an 'exorcist," he continued. The drama of the exorcism not only gets them the attention they crave, but also provides a temporary distraction from the problem that drove them into hysteria in the first place.

For example, a woman of 25 who used to get into a frenzy before Christ's statue, was told that she would be well when sprinkled with holy water. She went through the ritual and was 'cured'. It was actually her belief that she would be cured and the attention which she got that did the trick.

The Catholics of Kerala use for purposes of exorcism a particular green herb locally called *Karinochi*, which has a pungent smell, said to be repugnant to spirits. When the herb is smelt by the victim, the spirit is said to flee almost immediately. This practice has been borrowed from the Malayalee Hindu community of Trichur. A number of the black magic practices among the Christians in Kerala are borrowed from the Ezhavas, a Hindu community on the lower rung of the social ladder. "But upper caste Hindus, too, practise black magic when it suits them," claims Father V. Their deity is also Chathan. The typical style of the black magician in Kerala, according to Father N., another Malayalee priest, is to insert a mantra into a fruit presented to the unsuspecting victim. He may even throw an 'enchanted' metal piece into the enemy's vegetable garden or compound. The belief is that, in such a case, the house will be haunted by ghosts. But there is immense wealth and fortune awaiting the adventurous person who discovers the article; for him the thing paradoxically becomes a talisman against evil.

Certain priests are believed to be gifted in sensing an evil presence in the house. In such a case, the priest will warn the householder of the consequences of his actions and will ask him in the name of Jesus to renounce all association with the mantravadi and to embrace Christ again. Rarely do Christian priests come across cases of witchcraft and exorcism. As Father N.

put it, echoing Father V.'s point, most cases need a psychiatrist's help more than anything else. Only the cases that defy logic and scientific explanation, are referred to a bishop. If he in turn is satisfied that it is a 'genuine' case of spirit possession, the 'victim' is put in charge of a priest, who has mastered the technique of exorcism. According to Christian strictures, such a priest must have certain qualifications, or the exorcism will be ineffective. He must be a man of God with an unselfish motive for curing the victim, and an ardent devotee of Christ. Generally, the exorcist himself volunteers to take over the case. In such a case no psychiatric treatment is involved, since it is believed to be one of genuine possession, which, the educated priests believe, is extremely rare.

The ritual

The Christian exorcism ceremony is simpler and less exacting than the Islamic and Hindu rituals prevalent in the area of our study. The priest simply puts his hands over the victim's head and if there really is an evil spirit within, it will call the priest by his name in the victim's voice and tell him to "mind your own business, as I am minding mine". This is the point at which the verbal and physical tussle between good (personified by the priest, representing Christ), and evil (Satan) begins. The spirit will verbally and physically abuse the priest and do anything to scare him away.

Here too, victims are sometimes tied up, because they turn violent. The priest's exorcism prayer is simple and direct. While fighting the writhing body, he chants prayers based on the Bible which are spontaneous, unlike the Hindu mantras and Islamic incantations which have to be accurately memorized. Sometimes prayers can be improvized as long as they are Bible-based. They generally include the appeal, "O Jesus, you have helped us before," symbolizing the priest's total faith in Christ. Holy water is then sprinkled on the victim and the crucifix is placed before him. The 'magic' words, "In the name of Christ, I ask you to leave", are chanted repeatedly till the spirit is believed to have been expelled. Depending on the severity of the case and the "stubborness of the spirit", the exorcism takes hours, or even

days "to be successful". The accent during a session is usually on prayers and less on rituals, unlike Hindu and Islamic exorcisms.

Since most of the cases involve some kind of psychological disorder, the priests are equipped to deal with them even when they are still studying for priesthood. "In our 14 or 15 years of education, we study psychology in depth," says Father V. In such cases, one often has to tell the patient that he is possessed and that he will be cured by an exorcist, because that is what he believes, and his faith in the exorcist (a kind of dependence on others, the sign of a weak person) helps him help himself. This remedy works wonders in cases of hysteria, he says.[1]

A Maharashtrian lady of Christian faith once told Father V. that she had sought the help of a black magician to curse someone who, she believed, had initially cursed her. The priest dissuaded her from dabbling in black magic and asked her to renew her faith in the Christian Creed, beginning, "I believe in God". If this creed is recited backwards, it is said to be strong enough to repel a ghost.

"Though the devil can possess good people too, as in the Bible story of Job, Christians who do not waver in their faith are protected from evil," he concluded.

'Mummy'

Opposite Breach Candy Hospital, on a lane branching off from Bhulabhai Desai Road, stands a row of garages. One of them has been skilfully converted into a mini church. The proprietress as well as high priestess of this Church, a devotee of St. Antony, Sister Josephine Anthony, is a corpulent middle-aged Tamilian, who has a varied following of labourers and white collar workers. There is also a 'board of directors' protecting Sister Josephine's interests, treating her more or less as an institution. The 'directors' are both Hindus and Christians, who claim to have been 'cured' by her of spirits and ailments. She is lovingly called 'Mummy' by her devotees.

Mummy has a good P.R. man in her plump, good-looking nephew who gave up his job in the Middle East in order to be

with her. Her devotees hope to build some kind of spiritual healing institution, where Mummy will be the guiding force. "She intercedes on our behalf. She is our link to God," chorus her devotees. "She knows our minds and reads our thoughts,"—all due to her direct communication with her "mentor and guide", St. Anthony. Though Mummy stresses on Jesus being "the saviour", she reserves a special place for the prophet, St. Anthony.

Exorcism, too, is a business which requires publicity and my *Times of India* identity card worked like a passport. I was ushered into the inner sanctum, closed to the public at that time. Her initial reluctance to chat was later explained off (again by the eloquent nephew) as a distrust of newspaper reporters, specially after *Onlooker* magazine had published an article declaring her to be a fraud. In a marvellous multilingual monologue, Mummy described her life. She has had visions of St. Anthony ever since she was thirteen but she began using her gift of healing only after the age of sixteen. At this age she was already a war widow—her husband having been killed in Burma while serving the British during World War II. From Sri Lanka she travelled to India and Bombay, where she became a nun.

To 'sustain' her gift or 'power', she prays long hours, fasts on Tuesdays, and indulges in charitable work—she distributes money, clothes and food to some 800 people ritually on the 13th of June; and every Friday she distributes buns, bread and grapes to the poor. She herself doesn't ask for any contribution from people, assert her devotees. "If I ask my people for anything my power will go. I must be charitable and give, not expecting anything in return," she patiently explains in her English-Tamil-Hindi admixture. Those wanting to donate money are, of course, welcome. Also, she 'treats' those who are seriously sick and won't be allowed into the Catholic church for worship—lepers, for instance. She devotes one day a week to helping the poor and the sick.

Apart from physical and spiritual healing, she claims to have arranged marriages for 2,500 single people in Bombay alone, and jobs outside Bombay for some 2,000 others.

Mummy declares she is able to anticipate people approaching her for help. "I see a vision of the person at night and then St.

Anthony either discourages or encourages me to accept the case," she says. She can also 'sense' a menstruating woman and prohibits her from entering the inner sanctum. This practice has been 'lifted' from Hinduism, as menstruating Hindu women are generally barred from entering temples. The Church itself has no such inhibition. Apparently, some priests have not been too happy about the mixed nature of her rituals and doubt her ability to heal people. They only resent her popularity, counter her voluble supporters. Basically, it is the "paganization" of her rituals—the mixing of Christian practices with Hindu, that the Church is against.

The reason why she has not been ostracized by the Christian community is perhaps her total devotion to Jesus Christ and St. Anthony—figures central to the Catholic faith.

Mummy, it seems, can point out trouble by "reading" the wax of 13 candles, after they have melted and solidified into shapes. The person who comes for help has generally to undergo a Novena, which involves fasting and prayer once a week on a particular day, for nine consecutive weeks. During the Novena, 13 candles are paid for by and lit in the name of the supplicant by Mummy. When the candles melt, the wax runs into different shapes and patterns—and that, according to Mummy, constitutes the material for her 'crystal-gazing'. The message of those patterns is predetermined and very clear to her perceptive mind, she says.

If witchcraft is indicated, she then sets about the task of combating it. Her technique is very simple. First of all, she rids the victim of any talisman he or she might be wearing on his or her person. ("Most of my patients go to fraudulent godmen, before they come to me. Talismans are a means of controlling a person totally and are hence evil in nature," she sermonises.) Subsequently, she splashes 'holy water' on the 'victim' and utters the lord's prayer. In case the victim is possessed by an evil spirit, he or she will, at this stage, begin quivering violently, since "no evil spirit can stand contact with anything holy".

Illustrating her point, she talked about one of her important exorcisms, where a raving 50-year-old woman was brought to her church. When she sprinkled holy water on her, the woman

began struggling and screaming. At that stage, Mummy, says she inserted a hot rod in the woman's mouth and then proceeded to beat her. Despite the violence, the woman was unscathed at the end of the treatment, claims Mummy. And she was cured, of course! Like Sakhare, of Khopoli, Mummy maintains that violent treatment is meted out only in stubborn cases of possession. Most of her cases have been cured, say her followers and Mummy coyly nods her assent.

One of her devotees, a Mr. B., who was Deputy Chief of a prominent automobile company, was cured of epilepsy by her. When medicines failed, he went to Mummy, who gave him the 'trial' of 13 candles. The wax reading and a vision of her patron saint St. Anthony, confirmed that there was no black magic afoot and that he was suffering only from a bodily ailment. She asked him to undergo Novena for 13 weeks and he is now almost cured. Mummy concedes it was his utter faith in her prayers that helped him recover and she repeats, "Faith can even turn a stone into gold." Mummy, too, knows her psychology. The grateful patient, though supplementing the miracle with medicine, gives the full credit to Mummy. "No neurologist could cure me. It is only through Mummy's intercession that this miracle was brought about."

Mummy also claims to have been the 'driving force' in the birth of some 425 children. Her method of impregnating sterile women is simple. A coconut is grated and put into lukewarm water, and the resulting milk is strained. Then praying to St. Anthony, the woman drinks it. In praying to Jesus for a baby, holy water, oil and coconut[2] are generally used.

Mummy talks of having dealt with numerous cases of witchcraft. In one such incident, a chicken was poisoned and fed to a woman, with the result that she became sterile. During the "reading", the wax flowed into the shape of a chicken. Mummy showed me the congealed mass—it did look somewhat 'foul'! Apart from the chicken, the date, month and name of the black magician appeared in symbolic form, which only she could interpret.

If witchcraft is suspected, the person is advised to burn a candle upside down for 5 days and watch for the tell-tale pattern.

As long as evil is afoot, black wax emerges from the white candles. In that eventuality, the person continues praying and burning the candles till white wax emerges. That is a sign of everything returning to normal. There have also been times, Mummy says, when no wax at all emerges. That means trouble. In case spirits are hovering around, 13 'Hail Marys' and 'Our Fathers' are chanted and the candle is not burnt near the altar. The chanting reduces the power of evil. The result will show in the last candle, which will burn unhampered.

"A taweez (talisman) is another object where the controlling powers of the black magician are manifest. Worn next to the skin, it continues to worry the wearer." Sadhus and godmen, according to her, on the pretext of helping people in trouble, only create worse problems for them by giving them these talismans, which then establish complete control of the godman over the victim. "I don't say all, but most fakirs and sadhus are hoaxes—and are more often than not, black magicians, seeking to control unsuspecting souls."

Her little worship-room is full to the brim with a strange assortment of objects—from fine China images and teapots to weird taweezes and toys. "All of them had some spell or the other trapped in them till I neutralized them, with the grace of St. Anthony," she adds.

Another victim, a Hindu, had assumed a curiously leonine appearance. "He was getting hairier and worse tempered each day." On intuition, Mummy demanded, "Taweez nikalo". Surprised, the man took off and handed over a small talisman. It had an inscription mentioning the word 'lion'. Mummy, looking for all the world like Napoleon conquering Europe, concluded smugly: "I emerged victorious in the battle. He began feeling better immediately."

It is strange how exorcists belonging to different religions either revere or abhor talismans. Mummy and Haji Mohammed Hussain, the exorcist mentioned earlier in the book, are eternally suspicious of talismans, while Mohammed Yusuf, the Hindu-Muslim exorcist and Kallur Narayana Nambudiripad, the Malayalee Tantric exorcist, believe implicitly in their healing powers,[3]

Once, a Catholic family which had apparently insoluble domestic problems requested Mummy to help them. Mummy began her fasting and praying, while the family 'purified' themselves with holy water and oil. The process was repeated, when a statue of virgin Mary, with the infant Jesus in her arms suddenly caught fire. Mummy displayed the statue to me. "What does it look like?" she eagerly queried. I examined it. The flames had left the upper part of the figure untouched but the lower portion, which comprised of the Virgin's gown, looked as though it had been carved into the likeness of a goat's hindquarters. I said as much and Mummy beamed. "That is so. The fire melted the wax into a pair of goat's hooves—leaving behind the unmistakable, stamp of the devil." The exorcism prayers were said and the family was brought back to normal.

In 1972, continues Mummy, citing yet another case, a Maharashtrian doctor working at a big hospital in Bombay went berserk. She began throwing things around the house and tearing the clothes off her body. She would laugh, then suddenly get serious and generally behave like a lunatic. No amount of medicine could cure her. The young woman burnt the 13 candles required of her at Mummy's church. Mummy 'discovered' it to be a case of black magic. The doctor went through her Novena, using holy water and oil continuously for five days. She was cured, says Mummy, and even got married soon after. Subsequently she brought her husband along to be blessed too.

One Mrs. H.J.G., a relative of the Maharaja of Baroda had a retarded child whom she brought to Mummy hoping for a cure. During prayers with Mummy, the holy water turned pink, "Ask Mrs. H.J.G.," says Mummy's nephew, her mouth-piece, "She will testify to the miracle." He produces a type-written testimony, signed by Mrs. H.J.G., one of the many preserved by Mummy as 'proof' of her healing powers. The child, he says, is now better.

Though Mummy and her kind believe in faith, it is not a person's faith in himself which they believe can solve his problems. His faith has to be in superior beings (like themselves). However, faith alone is not enough—as mentioned before, one of her patients had to supplement her 'faith cure' with regular medi-

cines. Mummy's prompt answer to this is, "Christ never denied science. Prayer and medicine go together."

Mummy's process of prophesying through 'wax-reading' has been witnessed only by her inner circle of followers. Lack of concrete proof here can only lead to scepticism regarding such miraculous powers.

Mummy even claims to have privately predicted that Skylab, that ill-fated American satellite, "would fall harmlessly into the open sea, near Australia". She displayed a peculiar wax configuration resembling splayed human fingers. "The protuberances indicated that the satellite would fall beyond India, and further than that, beyond the Indian Ocean—each 'finger' indicating distance between India and the actual area of contact." It is a pity Mummy did not disclose her discovery to the panicking public at that fateful time!

Muslim

Haji Muhammed Hussain, the U.P. born, slit-eyed 'baba' of Mahim says that an evil presence or spell can be destroyed by chanting incantations or *Kulas* of the Quran, such as:

1. The Qul ya Ayyohal Kafiroon
2. The Qul Ho Allaho Ahal
3. The Qulaoodu Birabbin Falaq
4. The Qulaoodu Birabbin Naas

The 'Ayatul Kursi' is an *ayat* or chapter of the Quran which is potent in battling evil.

"Allaho la Ilaha Illa
Huwal Haiul Qayyoom."

This is an example of the prayers contained in the Ayatul Kursi. Such incantations exhort the evil presence to vanish in the name of Allah.

These powerful incantations should only be chanted under the guidance of an ustad or guru, since, by reading these ayats, jinnats (spirits) are invoked, which can drive the inexperienced chanter mad. (This is reminiscent of the tantric guru who admonishes his pupil for reciting holy verses without proper guidance.) Also, cautions Hussain, only a devoted Muslim, who religiously reads his namaz five times a day, bathes an equal

number of times, avoids odourous food like raw onion, garlic, etc.—in other words a 'true follower of Islam'—is empowered to recite them. The incantations are generally read out to control spirits, good as well as evil. In the process, one is automatically protected from evil forces.

The four Kulas can be recited for the treatment of minor cases of witchcraft too, adds Mohammed Yusuf—the Kurla exorcist. Restlessness, lack of appetite, etc. are symptoms of these illnesses. At this point, each Kula ought to be repeated three times while blowing on the victim, accompanied by a caressing motion of the palm, all over the body. Blowing and the hand movements symbolize brushing away the sickness which is by nature 'impure' and evil. Yusuf also lays emphasis on the 'purity' of the chanter, urging that he must necessarily be a vegetarian in order to obtain permanent power from the four Kulas. The power thus gained helps in the treatment of severer cases of witchcraft. Here too, as in Hindu rites, timings are central to prayers. Recited in the morning, the Kulas are considered auspicious to begin a job with, and chanted in the evening, they are said to be imbued with a special power to subjugate one's enemies.

"Bismillah-e-Rehamane Rahim" — an incantation with the numerical value of 786 is also believed to be a powerful protection against evil and is worn as an amulet on the body. (Numerology is also an important part of tantra—where vibrations of a mantra add up to a certain number. Christians too believe in the significance of numbers as symbolized in the number attributed to the devil—666—worn by those worshipping the Anti-christ.) 786 is a prayer, which when translated reads as: "In the name of Allah. most beneficient, the Merciful. . ."

Exorcism prayers are begun with this entreaty, like the plea in the name of Christ for the devil to abandon a body. It is believed that Christian exorcists too have to be totally devoted to Christ and Christian tenets, perhaps more so than others of their creed, in order to be 'blessed' with the power of exorcism. Nambudiripad, the Hindu exorcist, also battles house-bound spirits in the name of Durga, the reigning deity of his ancestral home.

Generally Muslim holy men have their patron saints who also guide them in controlling their celestial helpers, the maukils or spirits. 'Baba' professes to be guided by the martyr Pir (saint) Ghazi Masud Sayed Masud Salaad Rehmatullalay, of Bahraish, U.P., which is where his tomb is situated. When needled with provocative questions, the baba, apparently a meek and illiterate individual, becomes aggressive and is surprisingly witty in his repartee. This is when his patron saint 'possesses' him, protecting him from the onslaughts of *Kafir* or non-believers, explain his followers. To prove their point, they 'provoked' baba into an argument on Islam, and the lethargic old man tensed visibly, his eyes narrowing into glinting slits. He volubly extolled the virtues of Islam and 'damned' the heathens. The host nudged me and whispered, "His pir is a staunch Muslim and can't bear any criticism of Islam—it's really him talking." When baba goes into a trance like this he is also supposed to be able to read peoples' minds, though when I asked him to read mine, he declared he would do so only when 'ordered' by his saint. Then he suddenly subsided. ("He has been distracted," was the explanation.) He blinked apologetically around and returned to his slit-eyed inscrutibility. He claimed not to have remembered anything. The old man is also supposed to have solved a number of cases of spirit possession and witchcraft. This is yet another example of divination by virtue of spirit possession—the patron saint having 'entered' baba's body in order to 'converse' with those seeking audience. In most cases of divination, the personality of the medium is submerged and that of the possessing deity or spirit emerges.

Ibrahimbhai, one of Baba's ardent devotees, had the following gory story to recount. His wife spotted a spirit in the shape of a woman one evening. Shortly after, she developed a severe pain in the stomach and chest, which would not be cured. She suffered agony for eleven years. To add to the problem, Rs. 500/- disappeared from the safe one summer evening. To make matters worse, their daughter lost her eyesight. An exorcist suggested a reading of the Quran, during which the wife began screaming hysterically. It was 'obvious' to the exorcist that the spirit she had espied had possessed her. To leave the body, the

spirit demanded a cock, which was duly beheaded. The body continued to scamper around the room even in its headless state. Ibrahimbhai realized that the spirit had no intentions of quitting but was instead maliciously determined to stay. The cock was finally captured and buried. The cock was used as a substitute victim—the evil spirit having been enticed away from the woman into it with the help of Quranic incantations. "It was only baba who was able to exorcize my hapless wife," concluded Ibrahim.

Some spirits demand flowers, 'sindur' and coconuts for propitiation. The spirit is then 'transferred' (as in tantra) into these objects which are then burnt or cast into the sea. This is similar to the Malayalee ritual of trapping spirits in images of Kali or Durga, and burying them.

In another case dealt with by baba, pillows suddenly sprang to life and zig-zagged their chaotic way in and out of rooms. Food cooked in the kitchen invariably developed a revolting odour, which was not the case with food bought from outside. Baba diagnosed the problem as one of black magic and uttered exorcism prayers from the Quran. He prayed over an egg and a lemon and subsequently asked the housewife to prepare food. The 'experiment' succeeded. The spirits had been exorcized, claimed the inhabitants of the house, who were visiting baba the very day I did.

Yusuf Patel, of Mahim, Bombay, a foreman with a shipping company and baba's host in the city, also came into contact with baba because of a spell cast on his wife. His story is equally weird.

One fateful night, bottles containing 'holy' water from the *dargah* (tomb) of Sheikh Ali Makhdoom, a Muslim saint, began skipping about like mischievous little children. "Evil was obviously mixed with the water," explains Patel, his wife vigorously nodding agreement.

"Immediately after that, my wife went berserk. She began tearing the clothes off her body." When she did not recover, a well-wisher in the neighbourhood mentioned baba to Patel. With his control over evil spirits and the help of his spiritual mentor, the Pir, baba says he was able to exorcize the evil. And the

agnostic Patel, who was also a heavy drinker was 'reformed' overnight. He became a believer and begged baba to live with him.

Baba himself has an obscure past. He says he was an idle young man with no sense of direction in life. After his mother's death he said, her spirit 'visited' him. She 'commanded' him to go to Ghazi Masud's tomb in Bahraish, U.P. A dutiful son, he obeyed. After meditating in the dargah for a few months, he was commanded by the Pir's spirit, who had by then 'adopted' Haji Muhammed Hussain, to go to Bombay, assuring him of his constant though invisible companionship. "Lazy, as I was," drawls baba, "I decided to stay where I was. But I got a resounding slap on the back that almost knocked out my teeth. I knew my Pir was annoyed."

A very determined Haji Mohammed Hussain headed resolutely towards Bombay. He laboured in the metropolis for a living and "helped the needy with my new found healing powers". After a while, he quit his job and began another full-time one of "helping people out of their problems". "My pir never deserted me. He is with me here still," he whispered, pointing at the ceiling. It has now reached a stage when the Pir 'enters' his body and controls his thinking, not only to help him advise people about their problems, but also to indulge in philosophical polemics with 'intelligent and informed' people! Adds Yusuf: "You see, he himself is uneducated and the only way he can answer intelligent questions with quotations from Islamic literature which he has never read, is when his Pir controls his mind."

A trade union leader of the shipping company that Yusuf Patel worked in, had a sick father, who refused to respond to treatment and remained unconscious for nine months. The Mahim Maulvi traced the problem back to the young man's native village. "Only one coconut and some flowers will be needed. No sacrifice or expensive Hindu rites are required if you follow my advice," he told them. The leader, a devout Maharashtrian Hindu from Satara, agreed. The puja was performed in his village. Shortly after it, a sound, as if someone was rushing through the undergrowth, was heard. "Quiet!" cautioned baba. "It is the spirit." "*Menda Paize*", squeaked a voice,

in Marathi. The ghoul was demanding a sheep! It gave the sick old father a start. He remembered how a family tradition of sacrificing sheep to a village deity had gradually dwindled and stopped a few generations ago. Baba asked the son to scatter rye in the fields. While doing that, the son reported hearing a hissing sound in the field. "That was the spirit again," Baba declared nonchalantly. "But your father has been protected by me, so don't worry."

A month later, when baba returned to Bombay, he claimed to have been troubled by the spirit who tried every trick, from attempted assault to 'bribing' baba, to stop him from helping the old man and his family. It also threatened to 'hurt' the young grandson of the family, in case the exorcist refused to comply.

The grandson did have an accident as he got hit by a bicycle, says baba, but the mishap was minor and despite his subsequent convulsions, he was healed by prayer.

The union leader, who does not wish to be identified, says that though things are better, they have yet to see whether they are rid of the spirit or if it is merely playing for time.

Mohammed Yusuf, has other antidotes. He claims to have survived all his 42 years purely on a diet of milk—four litres a day—and nothing else. Known affectionately as 'Munshiji', by his followers, he says he is an exorcist, physician and consultant, rolled into one. Though he is a Muslim and is well read in Islamic texts, he wears a Nehru cap and prescribes the "all powerful" gayatri mantra for ridding people of the effects of black magic. Mantravad and Tantra, both of which have strong roots in South India, are evil, he says, and can be battled with bhakti (devotion) which, unlike the two, has unlimited powers. "Evil is always limited in its powers," he concludes philosophically.

"Jhad lagaye babool ka,
Aam Kahan se Khayen"

(If you have planted a bush of 'babool', how can it produce mangoes? In other words, you reap only what you sow.)

His remedies for black magic are simple and devoid of the typical Hindu ritualistic fuss—though he does employ Vedic mantras. He quotes a few cases to illustrate his method. One

R. R. Shinde, of Ratnagiri once "went off his rocker" because of a spell, cast on him by an evil-minded relative. The poor man seemed to have caught the cleaning bug, constantly washing and sweeping his house, totally stripped of all clothes. Munshiji mixed him a mantra 'medicine' on fine paper to be dissolved in water and taken twice or thrice a day. (Though the mantra was Hindu, the method employed in 'administering' it was purely Islamic.) The mantra was in the pattern:[4]

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After swallowing the mantras the man felt sleepy. When he woke up, claims Yusuf, he put on his clothes for the first time since his fit and was back to normal. Munshiji also discovered that the black magic had been indulged in by the man's elder brother.

Mantras, if swallowed and 'released' in the body, are supposed to be as powerful as if they are chanted. The effect is the same—that of producing powerfully positive vibrations, aided by the deity invoked (Allah in the case of Muslims).

Gangaram Govind, another fan of Yusuf's whom I met, suffered from fear psychosis for eight long years. He felt his blood was 'drying up'. Yusuf tied a mantra—written on a piece of paper—to a peepul tree and repeated it on another, finer piece of paper, which was dissolved in a drink administered to Gangaram. On the fifth day he felt better.

All was well till one evening, when his children and neighbour's kids got involved in a fight, resulting in the neighbour thrashing Gangaram's child. When Gangaram protested, the neighbour attempted to beat him too. But Gangaram reasoned with him and he calmed down, and even invited Gangaram to dinner. Gangaram is convinced that something 'evil' was fed to him that evening, because his troubles began again, just after the feast. He found himself submitting totally to the neighbour's whims. His scooter, the poor man's prized possession, was also stolen by him. A well wisher brought him

once more to 'Munshiji' who treated him with 'mantras' from Hindu religious texts. Gangaram is still undergoing treatment.

"The daughter of a seth was once hospitalized at Breach Candy for chronic stomach pain," says Munshiji. "I passed a hand over her body chanting the gayatri mantra five times, punctuating it with the prefix 'OM' each time. The pain disappeared. I discovered that her maternal uncle Champaklal had fed her mantra poisoned food, so that she would sicken. You see, he was after her property."

Mantras that are fed to a person can also produce evil vibrations, as in this case. This happens when the vibrations of a mantra add up to an inimical number—i.e. the mantra is distorted in such a way as to have an evil effect on the person 'ingesting' it.

Munshiji knows Hindu scriptures, and passages from the Bible and Quran by heart. Each of these contain mantras that are suitable for battling black magic, he says. He uses them as and when they are suitable, notwithstanding the person's religion. He is vehement that the original Hindu religion with its practices is Dravidian in origin, and was later 'diluted' by the Aryans. According to Munshiji, the powerful gayatri mantra is not an Aryan mantra, as is generally believed, but has its origin in the ancient Dravidian Hindu culture. *Sanatan Dharmis*, or the orthodox Hindus, still follow the original Hindu religion, he adds, while the Aryans—specially the Arya Samajis—'distorted' it. Yusufbhai is more particular than an orthodox Hindu about rituals. In many ways, he has an interesting, if complex personality. Despite being a Muslim, he seems to rely more on Hindu scriptures. He is supposed to have cured a judge's blind son through Vedic mantras. Outside his brother's shop in Kurla's busy marketplace, there was a stream of his devotees, most of them victims of black magic.

Unlike 'babaji' of Mahim, Yusuf believes in talismans for protection against evil. While I watched, he tied five knots on a string, 'trapping' the gayatri mantra in each one, by chanting it over the knot. It was an effective protection against witchcraft, he said, as he handed it to a cripple to wear next to the skin.

"The power of the gayatri mantra is such that once when I

conducted a 'havan', the sacred fire over which I had chanted the mantra burnt continuously for 25 days, without being refuelled."

There are various permutations and combinations of the 'gayatri'. Every combination has vibrations, he explains, which suit a certain type of person temperamentally. Though all the combinations are powerful against evil if used correctly, a special one suiting the person has to be tried, tested and used for success.

A talisman or a Rosary given to a witchcraft victim has 3 to 5 knots (all depending on the size of the string) with 200 mantras tied in them—which may be the gayatri plus other mantras or maybe other mantras excluding the gayatri, depending on the case and the temperament of the person. (That sounds a bit like a medical case where the patient's ailment is treated according to his or her constitution.). Mass treatment for a common complaint cannot be undertaken, he says.

The Arabic incantion, "*Ya Badial Ajaye—be, bil Khaire Ya badiyo*", if chanted 1200 times from 9.30 p.m. to 1.30 a.m. is said to be useful in exorcizing spirits and ridding a person of any other symptoms of black magic. It literally means: "O Allah, you are the Creator, you can destroy life and can change destiny and if I deserve a good destiny, give it to me."

This ardent plea, if repeated with intense concentration, is said to produce the vibrations essential in destroying evil.

14 Consequences

The Suspects

The belief in and antipathy towards witchcraft is so powerful that those even vaguely suspected of it suffer gruesome punishments. During the famous witchhunt of the dark middle ages, in Europe, the usual tests for witches were their believed insensitivity to pinpricks, their habits of throwing their head back, intertwining their fingers and walking backwards; their inability to cry and their uncanny ability to float in water.

Those suspected of practising witchcraft were subjected to torture. In Europe, they were cut up, suspended from the ceiling, raped, chopped to bits or tortured in some other gruesome way. In one case in England, a farmer suspected of witchcraft was murdered—his heart slashed in the shape of a cross, the pickaxe buried in his flesh.

Church priests satisfied their lust on female suspects, on the pretext of punishing them. A suspect had no protection from the law at all and anything was permitted, from cutting her hair, to raping or murdering her. Also, there was a strange custom by which a suspect was thrown into a pond to see if she would float. (Witches were generally believed to be women.) If she did, she was confirmed as a witch and killed, and if she sank, she was given the benefit of a church funeral!

The infamous Salem witch trials held in 1692 have gone down in history as one of the most terrible outcomes of the European belief in witchcraft. They not only harmed the victims, but also posed a threat to the community. The indiscriminate accusations that resulted in the execution of innocent people were the result of fear that sprang from a system of beliefs held by most Westerners at that time.[4] Witchcraft in Salem—as in other places

including India—worked, because the persons involved believed in it.

In India, there are no criteria for recognizing a witch except on the flimsy basis of suspicion. As a result of this thousands of innocent people have lost their lives on the West Coast alone. Witness, some newspaper reports:

In June 1979, in an Andhra village—close to a part of my region of study—a suspected sorcerer was thrown alive into the funeral pyre of a man by his enraged sons. Just before the old man expired, he is said to have told his sons that he was dying of a sorcerer's curse. The only suspected sorcerer attending the father's funeral was picked up and bodily thrown into the pyre. He was burnt to death.

On September 23, 1974, panic gripped Malad, a suburb of Bombay, resulting in the closing of schools. This happened because of a rumour that a woman with a 'fatal touch' was moving about among schoolgoing children. Children were rushed home by panicky parents and schools in the area closed down. The mob's wrath was directed against a suspected woman, who was mercilessly beaten without ascertaining facts. To pacify the crowd, the police drove around in jeeps fitted with loudspeakers, appealing against the spreading of false rumours. Soon after this incident, one Ziphar Barkya Pari of Dahanu was reportedly arrested for hacking to death his aunt, whom he suspected of dabbling in black magic.

Sometimes the sorcerer over-reaches himself and becomes a victim of his own cleverness. In a tragi-comic case at Trichur, on March 24, 1955, a foolish magician, trying to impress children, lost his spell and life at a school show. The amused children tied a rope around his neck and pulled it while the magician cast a 'spell' over himself to defy death. His spell failed. At the end of the show, instead of heading home triumphantly, he ended up in the mortuary.

Newspapers also published the comic case of a soothsayer, in Nasik district, who claimed to have a bevy of slaves from the other world. Adivasis who feared him said he could blight the crops or spirit away the cattle of non-believers, and put a curse on people or cure diseases as he willed. He was also supposed

to be guided by spirits, who were said to daily 'light' his way back from a midnight bath with celestial lamps. It was unfortunate for the man that the police commissioner decided to witness the 'miracle' and caught, instead of ghouls, the man's colleagues dancing the will-o-the-wisp around him. The cheat was hauled up by the law for exploiting gullible people.

Most cases, however, are far from amusing. They are tragic and grisly. In one case, a 30-year-old woman of Malad, suspected of practising witchcraft, was stabbed to death. On November 20, 1974, three widows of the village Mouje Jopul in Nasik district were stripped and beaten by five men and women on suspicion of having indulged in black magic. In 1969, a resident of Delisle Road, Bombay, lodged a complaint with the Bombay coroner, accusing his wife and brother of having caused the death of his young son by black magic. Such cases are a dime a dozen. Fear, ignorance, superstition and disrespect for human life make mere incidents out of cold-blooded murders.

The Tortured

For some patients seeking cures by witchcraft, the result has been death. The following episodes have been gleaned from news-reports. On April 11, 1972, a teenaged girl was brought to two goldsmith-exorcists, who pulled her hair and beat her with hot tongs till she lost consciousness. When her relatives returned the next morning, they discovered her battered corpse in the house.

On December 31, 1977, near Broach in Gujarat, a baba, deemed to have supernatural powers, beat a 45-year-old 'possessed' woman to death. His bag of tricks could not bring her back to life, however, and she was buried in great secrecy and haste. What is shocking about the whole episode is that the victim's relations were a willing party to the expeditious disposal of the corpse. If it had not been for an informant and the prompt arrival of the police, it would have remained a secret.

Newspapers too have contributed their share in perpetuating the occult myth. In the 1970's, rumours published by irresponsible newspapers of college boys, policemen and children having been 'bewitched' and found roaming aimlessly and depressed re-

newed the fear of witchcraft, inciting mob frenzy in a number of cases. In 1973, one such rumour caused the death of five people, while three were admitted to hospital in a serious condition, because of a report in a local paper that a 13-year-old boy had been killed by a vampire. The situation got so serious, with vengeful mobs attacking every possible stranger in town, that the police had to distribute handbills explaining the fear of the blood suckers to be baseless, and send vans fitted with loudspeakers, making announcements to dispel the fear. A most recent and telling example of public panic was the killing of Anand Margis in Calcutta by an irate mob, who believed that the Margis were kidnapping children, when not blatantly demanding them from fearful parents, for the Marg's activities. The hatred for the Margis who had built up a reputation of being ruthless tantrics, converged and finally erupted into violence when the opportunity presented itself.[2]

15 Conclusion

We have studied and analyzed a variety of witchcraft beliefs and rituals in this book. There are probably other cases and variations of rituals that have eluded me during my travels down the Indian West coast, but the principle underlying all rituals is the same. The throwback to ghosts and devils is basically the result of the impression that death makes on man. Death as an end is not acceptable—so life of some other sort is visualised after death. And that life is subtly linked with human existence in that it interferes in human affairs, at the instance of a 'medium' In other words, gods and ghosts basically exist to cater to human needs and desires. These beliefs are particularly strong in societies with limited empirical knowledge and a poorly developed technology. Though India is well on its way to industrialization, 70% of its population is illiterate and living in rural conditions. Those who come to the city bring their traditions in tow, and these are passed on to their children. Despite receiving education that emphasizes the values of science and secularism, their progeny remain anchored in the mire of a primitive culture. This is the contradiction that is India. Education has not reached the masses and the minority that has had the privilege of receiving it, neatly divorces it from its lifestyle. The spirit of inquiry, even amongst the literate, has been suppressed by customary beliefs, that function as blinkers. But even here, custom has been manipulated to suit the need of the shrewd bourgeoisie.

The belief in black magic is used as a political tool. The equivalent of satanic power and evil is sometimes ascribed to political and social deviants, who are publicly accused, condemned and suppressed. As an example of the former, people holding key positions of power have, in the past, been accused of

having links with the Anand Margis—the much published mystical group accused of practising tantric rites, often associated with black magic. In peasant communities too witchcraft beliefs are instruments that preserve social norms. Any deviation from these norms is inconceivable, because that would mean the break-up of these tightly knit inflexible communities where one lives at close quarters with kinsmen, with whom one must cooperate in order to survive. In such communities, old traditions are preserved and social mobility is slight. Consequently, interpersonal tensions build up. In the absence or the inefficacy of the society's normal machinery of settling disputes, such as courts or similar assemblies, people resort to witchcraft, in this way discharging tensions that might, otherwise, destroy the cohesiveness of the community. An irate person, hence might resort to witchcraft, or, conversely, accuse his enemy of witchcraft, in case he feels he has been cheated out of property. The anger is taken out on an individual, instead of the community which may have deprived the avenger of his rights.

Primitive Tribes of the Modern Family

Agriculture and fishery being the primary occupation of the people along the Indian West coast, most witchcraft believers are either from peasant or fishermen's communities. These communities are practically like one large family, where almost all are related to each other. It is like the joint family system on a larger scale. For example in Kerala, the traditional family limit consists of parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins living together, either in one house or a series of houses close together, and the rest of the 'family', consisting of relatives through marriage, is scattered throughout the community. These communities are a contemporary version of the kinsmen's tribes, which are progenitors of today's social structure.

In some of the archaic communities, the elders are the watch-dogs of norms and traditions, punishing any divergence by the threat of expulsion or, worse still, by the accusation of witchcraft or devil possession. Customs here serve the same purpose as codified laws and have the force of the community behind them. Customs are more readily adhered to than laws, since the former have the sanction of the community, rather than the state

(the state is always perceived as a coercive entity, separate from the people, whereas the community is seen as an extension of one's family. Another reason for the deep attachment to myths and superstitions is the parental complex Indians have. A father figure—whether he be one s own parent or a community elder, is always held as an ideal and a model for one's behaviour and attitudes. Children are always taught to obey older and hence 'wiser' people. Sanction for actions therefore, is looked for from 'higher authorities'. This attitude extends into religion where gods and goddesses are upheld as father and mother-figures. Most Indian children are taught to look up to the 'Father of Fathers' or the 'Mother Incarnate' (i.e. the family deity) for guidance. Even a dacoit or a murderer prays to his deity for 'inner strength' needed in his profession.

All misfortunes (the result of disturbed social relationships) in such a community are attributed to witchcraft and sorcery—a manipulation of these gods and goddesses for wrong ends through prayer and petition. The conception of these imaginary activities along with belief and faith in the community's healing techniques, provides the people with explanations for their ill-luck and prescribes steps for its removal. These steps, though unrelated to the actual causes of their misfortunes (low level of technology, illiteracy, poverty) are of psychological value to the believers and tend to reinforce their belief system. Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, a British anthropologist, made this type of observation in his classic study, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937), a pioneering study of the beliefs of an African tribe. This theory holds good with the depressed communities of the West Coast too. For example if a Malayalee girl falls sick or has an accident, a mantric, instead of a doctor, is consulted. The mantric or oracle points to the 'witch' or other mantric responsible for the 'curse' that made her sick. Through rituals, either the 'poison' is exorcized from the girl's body, or the culprit is induced to withdraw his witchcraft. The patient gets better—as most patients do anyway.

If the exorcist fails, the failure is explained away by hypotheses that support the basic belief in divination—for example, the oracle poison used was of the wrong kind, or was stale, or the oracle was upset by someone else's use of witchcraft, etc.

The belief system is circular in structure and self-perpetuating. Each doubt or failure has a ready answer that serves to perpetuate the myth further. Also, the esoteric vocabulary of the rite and the sense of the forbidden surrounding it, adds to the respect in which it is held by common folk.

E. B. Tylor, another noted anthropologist, had a similar rationale for the continued existence of witchcraft. He wrote in his book, *Primitive Culture* (1871) that when nature performed what the self-styled magician tried to achieve, it deepened the belief in magic. Also, attributing failure of a spell or rite to the breaking of taboos, or to hostile magic forces, served to strengthen the belief in witchcraft. This plasticity of the notions of success and failure as well as the weight of cultural belief and authority behind the magician also served a purpose. Elucidating the latter point, one could refer to the supremacy of the Malabar mantric. Rebellion against his authority is believed to damn the person, bringing the wrath of the community on him. The educated young are breaking away from his stranglehold successfully—but their superstitious elders are still in the grip of superstition and very much under the control of the mantric, or Nambudiri. The belief and faith in the Nambudiri's 'powers', give him enough margin for error. All he has to do is to blame his failure on a supernatural force, or yet another magician, and the devout lap it up, eager to please him—it is as though they were anxious to absolve him of any doubt that they should not have even dared to harbour against him.

Supernatural powers do not exist and the basic reasons why witchcraft is still practised have been dealt with above. With these arguments in mind, let us take a look at the arguments proffered by protagonists of witchcraft and other allied supernatural phenomena.

According to Indian spiritual philosophy, supernatural powers lie dormant in each of us. The way to awaken them is through meditation. Meditation involves such intense concentration that one becomes part of the object one meditates on, acquiring, in this way, the power to control it (the principle of similarity mentioned earlier). In the wider sense, it means that nature and her laws can be made to serve the experienced sorcerer.

Colin Wilson, an authority on the occult, feels that while the devil does not exist, black magicians and their powers are real enough. Though there are people, he says, (in his famous book, *The Occult*) who fake having an intimate knowledge of witchcraft and the rites involved—possibly because "their creative imagination takes the form of an increasingly burning resentment against the life that bores them" — it does not follow that occult powers do not exist. People do have occult powers, he claims, which enable them to cause "supernatural happenings". Such powers are more common among simple, rural folk, he says. Ploughing a piece of land with a miniature plough drawn by toads to make the field barren or sticking pins in clay images to destroy people (a practice also known as tona in the Chhatisgarh area) is effective, because, "when simple, blind faith grips the will and imagination with a strong idea, reality tends to conform to it". "For reasons that one does not understand yet," he says, "certain rites do produce results—at least when performed by the right person."

What he possibly implies is some basic principle of telepathy.[1] A series of reportedly successful experiments carried out by a Czechoslovak physician, Milan Ryz, appear to support Wilson's theory. According to a newspaper report, Ryz tells of a series of telepathic experiments, in which the sender concentrated on the anxiety of suffocation and conjured up racking fits of asthma, and the receiver, several miles away, suffered an intense, choking fit. When the sender concentrated on gloomy emotions and was given a depressant drug the receiver showed the appropriate EEG (Electroencephalograph) response. Another experiment in the realm of telepathic communication was conducted in 1963 by Dr. Jarl Fahler, president of the Psychical Research Society of Finland, who wanted to test the 'effect' of witchcraft. A woman's sense of touch was said to have been transferred to a glass of water. When the water was 'pricked' with a pin, the woman allegedly cried out in pain. After a reversal of the process, when the sensation was 'returned' to the arm of the woman and the pin inserted in the water, it is claimed that she felt no pain. This information was apparently passed on to Dr. Casimiro P. Navarro—a doctor of medicine and vice president of

the Philippine Parapsychological Research Society and Joel E. Fernandez, psychologist-hypnotist and secretary of the P. R. S., who wanted to see "just where in voodooism (witchcraft) the physical ended and the psychic and spiritual began". They planned to forward the results to the psychological research groups in the US and the UK for deeper study and evaluation. According to the researchers, someone who believes that he has been betwitched can think himself into illness and even death, and these experiments prove that "you don't have to think your own destructive thoughts. Someone else can think them up and point them at you."

This conclusion is, in fact, reminiscent of the Salem trials in 1692, at the time of the West's ghastly witch hunts. During the trial, one of the accused was asked to unpin her neckcloth and pin it on again. As soon as she did that, says the record, three young girls in the court cried out that they were afflicted by the pricks. According to a published transcript, the questioning went something like this:

Q: "Tell me, be you a witch?"
A: "I cannot tell."
Q: "But have you been a witch?"
A: "I cannot tell you."
Q: "Why do you hurt these folks?" (meaning the teenaged girls)
A: "I hurt nobody."
Q: "Do you prick these girls?"
A: "No, I pin my neckcloth."
Q: "Well, take out a pin and pin it again."

The transcript continues. "She did so, and all of the afflicted cried and said they were pricked. Mary Walcott was pricked in the arm till the blood came, Abigail Williams was pricked in the stomach and Mary Lewis was pricked in the foot."

The authenticity of the transcript is questionable, as it was written at a time when the belief in witchcraft was almost blind Those who recorded it, were themselves amenable to suggestion, since the atmosphere at that time was charged with superstition and suspicion. If one notices, the passage of the transcript quoted begins with the assumption that 'black power' did indeed exist

and no benefit of the doubt was accorded to the damned 'witch'.

The experiments of Milan Ryz, however seem more authentic, because a number of serious experiments attempting to discover the relationship between the mind and the physical world, have recently been carried out. The Soviet Union, as I have mentioned in the introduction, has been experimenting with the human psyche under the auspices of its intelligence bureau. But those experiments are still confined to the laboratories and it is not even certain that if confirmed, they would go as far as proving the authenticity of the theory of 'mind over matter' (the psychic in control of the physical) which is central to witchcraft and much talked about.

The mind over matter theory, which has its ramifications in spiritualism, has been rejected by materialists, specially the scientific socialists.

The psychic is not in control of the physical, they say. Material circumstances are not born out of abstract thoughts, but thoughts and ideas are reflections of the material conditions of the people. This theory, first propounded by Karl Marx, revolutionized philosophy and provided a new yardstick for understanding history. History, according to Marx, moves dynamically—it is basically a unity of opposites (thesis, antithesis, synthesis). It has links with the past, since it has been built on it. This dialectical method of interpreting history also enables one to interpret the future, because of its inherent logic.

In keeping with this argument, it can be said that the belief in witchcraft still exists because of its initial utility, which still finds place in technologically backward communities.

According to Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, in his research work, *Lokayata* (a scientific interpretation or Indian cults) magic, especially tantra, had its origins in agricultural magic. It came into being at a time when men were slowly switching over from hunting to cultivating crops. At that stage of transition, he says, women became more useful in the work of cultivation, since they were the ones who stayed at home to raise babies. In fact, he says, women were probably the ones to discover agriculture, since they spent a lot of time in one area, certainly more than their hunting mates. This and the fact that women, like nature, were productive, led to female-oriented fertility rites, that ultimately

developed into elaborate rituals that are practised even today. All magic is basically geared to enabling the human race to survive and multiply. This includes the religious rites and mantras, which, in singing the glory of the human race, mean the same thing.

Tantra is nothing but agriculture-related fertility rites, geared to achieving total womanhood. The basic rites of tantra aim at raising the *female* kundalini Shakti (the sex energy force) through the female nadis and chakras (their feminine nature is emphasised by representing them in diagrams—yantras—in the shape of lotuses and triangles—symbols of the female genital organ) into the sahasrara chakra in the brain—in the process transforming the human consciousness totally to that of a female. Giving a feminine character to one's psyche (if not one's physique) would automatically urge the female prakriti (nature) by the principle of similarity, to perform the feminine function of reproduction.

Most tantric rites involve the drawing of yantras (tantric designs) representing the female yoni with a triangle and lotus and the placing of elements of the earth (copper, gold and silver) as well as the produce of the earth (food) on them. This symbolically presents the similarity between human and natural fertility, and by this act, the sadhak hopes to persuade nature to procreate further for mankind's material prosperity. A more direct manifestation of the assimilation of human and natural fertility, says Chattopadhyaya, is the maithuna asana, the most important asana of tantra, that is the essence of the cult. By the imitation of the human procreative act, says Chattopadhyaya, nature is urged to do the same. Magic, therefore, is basically agriculture- and fertility-related rites, two sides of the same coin.

It was only later, when man had entered the pastoral stage and the toil of women in the field was not really required (cattle breeding saved time and produced more food than the laborious activity of cultivating crops, which depended entirely on chance and the weather), that the status of women fell. Here too, like the previous rites, the beliefs of the people were moulded to suit their economic conditions. With the importance of women being undermined, man again became the provider and the male reproductive organ came to be worshipped with the yoni. By then the relationship between copulation and conception had already

been accepted. Woman was no longer considered the only fertile sex. The human brain had already developed to the extent of grappling with this complicated idea. The connection between intercourse and childbirth having been established, semen came to be considered the life-giving agent, and so the penis was also revered (note the worship of the Shiva lingam). Also, during the pastoral era, men had more time to think about their environment. Thoughts could be 'elevated' from their survival-based roots (since the economy could afford easier living) to the level of abstraction. Man began creating his gods and philosophy was born. The idea of a supernatural being sitting in heaven, judging man's actions in this world, was brought about at this stage. This was the birth of spiritualism and the Vedic philosophy. This break from the totally materialistic beliefs of the agricultural stage occurred, says Chattopadhyaya, because of the division between mental and manual labour which came about at this stage. Those who still toiled in the fields (women as well) began to be considered inferior. Those who laboured with their hands still practised agricultural magic, but those who had the time and luxury to develop into 'thinkers' entered the era of philosophical thought. Even today, he says, the lower caste people, manual labourers, practise the original magic in all its agricultural aspects, and the genuine tantric rites involving human and natural procreation are looked down upon by the tantric pandits, who have preferred to spiritualize tantra.

Tantra, today, is a mixture of the practical (materialistic aspects) and the mystical (which was imposed on tantra in the Vedic age, to make it more 'respectable' to a growing class of brahmins, who did little, if any labour. Hence the throwback to spirits and the various gods and goddesses like Shakti, Shiva, Durga and Kali all worshipped in witchcraft rites, who were not initially conceived and placated, but were 'created' during the spiritual age.

If magic is still practised today, it is, according to Chattopadhyaya, because the material conditions of the people who practise it have not basically changed. Despite the introduction of technology, belts of human habitation remain economically backward and hence ignorant.

Magic, according to the materialists, was related to survival, and in this sense, served a basic need in the absence of a scientific yardstick.

Coming back to Colin Wilson's argument—his contention that simple, blind faith can work miracles and that a man can 'think' himself into what he may consider a 'miraculous' situation, is a half-truth embodying psychology. In such cases, it is the over-imaginative mind working in concert with the body. And his statement that "certain rites do produce results for reasons one does not yet understand" sounds obscurantist for someone who professes to have analyzed the occult phenomenon.

The occult phenomenon has been ascribed to modern man's "over-burdened psyche" by those who have studied it critically. Surprisingly, many newspaper editorials have discussed the subject. They have come to the conclusion, after analysis, that the "burdened human psyche" resorts to some defence and survival mechanism, in which it relieves itself of stress—and, as in some cases described, "passes the buck", as it were, to another object. "It is sound psychiatry," one of them suggested, while another unequivocally concluded, "In times of stress, man always seeks solace in myth and fantasy; that is a life-saving technique. Hence the throwback to devilry."

The argument is very similar to the one offered by anthropologists, that in times of socio-political tension as in primitive times, (which is what is implied by the rather vague term 'over-burdened psyche') people resort to witchcraft.

Faith does play a very important part in witchcraft. As Sister Josephine Anthony very succinctly put it, everything is possible with faith, even 'miracles'.

Miracles are results of actions that a man would normally feel are impossible to undertake successfully, but which neverthelsess succeed because of an added dose of will-power spurred on by faith in a deity.

Faith is also a reason for witchcraft's continued existence in modern times.

Faith produces confidence in oneself, resulting in a subconscious determination to succeed. Similarly, faith can blind a person to the magician's obvious human limitations, resulting in

total credulity. With such persistent idolization, it is easy for the magician and the exorcist to get away with anything.

Take the case of Bhanamati, a type of witchcraft reportedly prevailing in the Gulbarga district of Karnataka (ref. *India Today,* Sept. 1-15, '80). The inhabitants of Pastapur village in the district were terrorized by the black magic called Bhanamati, believed to produce stomach and skin diseases.

Bhanamati, which is also said to force women to strip and present themselves to the lustful sorcerers, is supposed to be cured by black magicians waving a lemon thrice over the head of the victim. The victim is asked to cut it. If the lime turns out to be blood red, the magician concludes that it confirms the presence of Bhanamati and demands Rs. 1,111 for 'exorcism' pujas. The amount is deliberately an odd number, as this makes the whole affair more credible. The black magician will then ask the victim to come back after 11 days, warning him or her that if the lime cut that day also drips blood, the rituals will have to be repeated, involving another Rs. 1,111. The people have total faith in the wily, fake magician. What the black magician actually does is to inject red ink into the lime or offer a knife smeared with an extract of the hibiscus flower (red in color) to the suspecting victim. Divination and incantations further blind the victim totally. The aura of mystery that surrounds this process induces further faith in it. And as it has been aptly put, "Success depends on the fear inspired in the victims." As for women being sexually charged, it has been explained as being nothing more than hysteria being whipped up—the women becoming victims of auto-suggestion. In some cases, sexual frustration also brings about a schizoid state, in which the woman becomes melancholic and a victim to hallucinations. These hallucinations are basically a 'wish fulfilment' on the part of the woman. Similar to the Gulbarga sexual phenomenon was the one involving Sakhare's patient mentioned earlier, where the woman claimed to have been sexually harrassed by her brother-in-law's ghost. In this case, her husband's long absences had probably brought her sexual desires into an uncontrollable state. Being unable to do anything about it, she turned schizophrenic and dreamt up visions of sexual assault which gave her pleasure.

The brother-in-law came into the picture only because he was young when he expired and she was probably attracted to him when he was alive.

Going back to the Bhanamati episode, this sort of superstition is also very akin to the 'Chatabadi', 'Chillangi' and the 'Kutticha-than' beliefs in Kerala, where some sort of evil manifestation is held responsible for physical as well as psychosomatic diseases.

The bizzare Bhanamati events were blamed on a pair of alleged sorcerers, who were accused of "letting loose" evil influences on the villagers. They were ostracized by the community. The two pleaded not guilty and blamed their predicament on a land dispute, alleging that the villagers had been instigated against them. Obviously here too witchcraft accusation was used to settle an economic issue.

The individual who revealed the Bhanamati fraud being perpetrated on the people is himself a professional magician. B. V. Pattabhi Ram, 33, apart from being a magician, is a weekly magic columnist of the largest circulated Telugu daily, *Eenadu*. He said that Bhanamati was only a psychic fear. People in the area are very superstitious, this combined with poor health and sanitation, gave rise to psychosomatic illnesses. A common stomach disorder was believed to be caused by a spell and many preferred to go to a black magician rather than a qualified doctor.

A Doordarshan producer who toured Gulbarga villages for T.V. development programmes, commented: "There is no place as remote as Pastapur, or with as many on the lunatic fringe."

A Times of India report dated 8 March, 1981, said, "A committee, headed by Dr. H. Narasimhaiah, former vice-chancellor of Bangalore University, which was appointed by the state government to investigate the phenomenon of 'Bhanamati', has attributed the sufferings of 'Bhanamati' victims to mental and physical diseases." It has reported that in some places, such psychological disturbances have assumed the form of 'mass hysteria', as in Yadlapur and Benekanahalli villages. The belief of the people that any physical or mental illness is owing to the Bhanamati witchcraft having been practised on them has been handed down from generation to generation. Even such ailments as

asthma, leprosy, tuberculosis, anaemia and vitamin deficiency have been attributed to Bhanamati. "There is no evidence of the working of any supernatural force" said the committee, which included scientists, physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists and legislators. "Vested interests have been using 'Bhanamati' as a means of exploitation."

The scene is similar at Chottanikara, where thousands believed to be victims of witchcraft flock to the temple there, in the hope of exorcizing themselves of spirits. One 'irreverent' woman snapped out of her trance when she spotted our camera and posed seductively for us during the gurudi ritual. The others, totally occupied with the gurudi ritual of frenzied dancing, were obvious cases of hysteria and self-suggestion.

What some of the patients were indulging in at the Chottanikara temple, was glossolalia, which Dr. Abraham Kovoor has described as the act of imitating the imagined speech, language, voice and even actions of a dead person. The symptoms were taken by the ignorant, to be those of spirit possession. Persons suffering from such mental aberration generally tended to exhibit them in the company of people who could hear and see them, he observed, in his *Begone Godmen*. The Chottanikara phenomenon fitted into this type of exhibitionism.

Dr. Somasundaram, a psychologist settled in Ernakulam, Kerala, had another point to add. He said that the behaviour, response and attitude of the 'patients' at the Chottanikara is really a matter of conditioning from early childhood. If a child is incessantly told that any untoward behaviour or symptom is the result of a curse, or spirit possession, he will naturally grow up believing it. The first time he is down with persistent fever or if he has a fit or shows symptoms of psychological disturbance his relatives will dash him off to the local exorcist, convinced that he has been 'bewitched'.

A number of patients seeking a cure at the Chottanikara temple are basically hysterical by nature, as a result of unfulfilled desires. The moment they are offered the object of their desires, they are suddenly cured and the 'curse' is said to have been 'dissolved'. As an example, Dr. Somasundaram quoted the case of a young boy suffering from fits (symptoms similar to those

in most Chottanikara 'patients') sent to him by a neurologist, who privately told him that the lad needed a psychologist more than a witch-doctor or even a neurologist. Somasundaram gave the boy some vitamin B-complex injections, 'suggesting' to him that he would be perfectly cured of his 'disease' with the 'miracle' drug. And so he was. Only, whenever he desired something desperately, and his parents refused to relent, he would have an instant relapse.

The trauma of a sexual experience together with a neurotic streak in a person can also lead to hysterical behaviour. Dr. Somasundaram did not rule out the possibility of some of the young female patients (the youngest being 14) at the Chottanikara temple—where the possessed were women only—having undergone a harrowing sexual experience, that left a mark on their impressionable minds.

Resort to hysteria is a catharsis—and combined with the belief in spirit possession, it becomes an effective block against reason for the 'victim'. The exorcist and the hypnotic ritual, instead of a doctor, becomes the woman's 'lifeline'.

The so-called possessed generally profess ignorance of what transpired during the trance, for fear of being questioned too closely. But in a number of cases, that lapse of memory is genuine, again because of auto-suggestion, which is given an impetus by the hypnotic rituals.

Witchcraft, as we have seen, is a convenient scapegoat, blamed for events otherwise inexplicable in terms of the limited scientific knowledge of the community. Vagaries of nature, diseases, other misfortunes and failures that have a rational, scientific explanation are blamed on sorcery. These communities are generally riven by tension, hostility and anxiety. It is not as if the people of these communities are continuously practising witchcraft or are continuously obsessed by fear of the evil influences of witchcraft—the people learn to live with the threat of witchcraft and sorcery, "just as members of modern societies learn to live with the threat of automobile or airplane accidents".

Despite acknowledging that such beliefs are harmful to any

community, whether primitive or modern, the belief in witchcraft has been revived all over world.

72-year-old Prof. John Kruse of Hamburg, while doing research on the occult, discovered that there were over 60,000 'practising' witches in West Germany as well as France and that major pharmaceutical industries in Germany and Italy, were specializing in the production of so-called 'demon powders', 'dragon's blood' and similar concoctions which made up the raw material for incantations. He also believed that in continental Europe, together with black magic, witchcraft 'antidotes' were also making a money-spinning headway.

The 'antidote' business is very reminiscent of our own street pedlars selling talismans of bear's hairs and nails, lizard's tail oil, a bit of soil stamped on by an elephant, etc., all believed to be effective in neutralizing the effects of black magic.

Regression is noticeable in other 'progressive' societies too, where primitive and non-commercialized forms of witchcraft are still in vogue. The American-Indian Navajo medicine man, like our Malabar tantric, still 'exorcizes' diseases with the help of paintings made from different coloured sand, much like our tantric designs made from rangoli. He too draws a sketch representing a religious hero's journey on behalf of the patient and chants incantations to chase away the sickness.

The African witch-doctor also exists today, and even in communist China, where the lid on superstitious mumbo-jumbo had been firmly clamped by the Cultural Revolution, two children were reportedly burnt in 1979, by a self-proclaimed witch-doctor claiming supernatural powers. The present leadership put the blame for this revival, as usual, on the Gang of Four. Also, fortune-telling and palmistry stalls have reportedly been set up in Changsha city in China, and antidotes to black magic are said to be sold at village fairs.

Whereas in the third world a revival of witchcraft can be seen as a continuation of primitive beliefs in a social fabric that, despite political change, has retained its original texture (the cultural revolution has not affected the grass root level of Chinese society), in the affluent West, it has become more of a fad—a bored

society's way of spending spare time and money on something exotic.

In the third world, these beliefs continue to persist because those societies lack the technology and economic prosperity of the West, as a result of which all misfortunes are blamed on abstract concepts like fate, gods, ghosts and spirits.

The Indian Experience

Superstition amongst the educated of the third world countries like India, is more forgiveable than amongst the fad-happy, trendy jet-setters of the affluent West. To the educated minority of the Indian West coast, it is an uphill task to break away from the traditional culture of the community that has been ingrained in them from childhood. Besides, industrialization and science have only recently made a foray into the cohesive middle to lower middle class Indian community of the area, for whom the upholding of cherished beliefs is one of the most important functions of the individual as well as of society. Also, their new-found wealth and education keep this class forever suspicious of the jealousy of their less fortunate relatives. In this context, the 'evil eye' phenomenon is feared the most. There is the constant fear that someone may cast a spell which will take away whatever they have gained. But it is also true that once such a family moves to the city, it is easier for them to break away openly, rather than in their native place, which is generally semi-rural or rural, and where the close-knit community and jealously guarded values will not allow a break. In an urban setting, severing relations with intimate associates in case of tension is easier.

It may sound contradictory to say that superstition and magic have undeniably made certain contributions to human society. As mentioned earlier in the book, communal magical rites were initially responsible for bringing humans together in a form of society, however crude it may have been. Twentieth century civilisation owes that debt to its primitive progenitor. Also, many ethical precepts and social laws, which now rest firmly on a solid basis of utility, may, at first, have drawn some portion of their sanctity from the same ancient system of superstition. For exam-

ple, says Frazer, the horror of the crime of murder was derived from the fear of the angry ghost of the murdered man. "Thus", he says, "superstition may have served as a convenient crutch to morality till she is strong enough to throw away the crutch and walk alone".

As mentioned in the chapter on tantra, magic rituals too have contributed to the science of alchemy. Tantra has been called a protomaterialist philosophy by scholars like Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, where concern with the body brought about experiments with it (rites involving corpses) and also ways and means of improving the health through herbal medicines.

But today superstition has outlived its utility and its continued existence can only mean regression—which, in an age of scientific progress, spells disaster for the country.

Only a politically aware and militant people, led by enlightened leaders, can bring about a truly representative government that not only initiates economic resurgence, but also fosters new cultural values—rooting out all that is retrogressive and decadent. Such a society is achievable and would exist on a materialistic rather than a 'spiritual' plane.

The theory of karma would then be geared to the daily toil of the common man and its rewards in this world, rather than to an obscure form of celestial retribution in a hypothetical world to come.

NOTES

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1. Why did menstrual blood become taboo in India? It was initially worshipped, during the primitive fertility rites, because it signified a woman's fertility and hence her capacity to procreate. Later, with the establishment of a patrilineal society during the Vedic period, women fell in status. The new age was also the age of spiritualism, when the earth-related fertility magic had developed into the spiritual philosophy of the Vedas. With the development of the two trends, woman and her reproductive functions (considered carnal and hence 'sinful') were totally condemned Hence, menstrual blood, which was initially considered a virtue, reminded them of the 'sinful' act of sex, and was now a curse. A belief had, in this sense, met its reverse and was synthesized into a taboo that is today both feared and respected. Blood, because of its association with fertility and because it is a life-giving substance, was 'imitated' in the powders (vermilion, *kumkum*) with which married Hindu women decorate themselves even today (in their *sindoor* in the parting of the hair or *bindi* on the forehead) signifying their "fertile" status as well as the fact that they are taboo for other men.

2. Magic was also the tool of an archaic society where, by magical beliefs, the people psychologically impelled themselves into harder work, which yielded good results. Thus confidence in magic equalled confidence in man's ability, though in an individual. Today these rituals survive not only because they have commemorative value, or because they have degenerated into superstitions, but also because a number of communities in India are at a stage of arrested growth where their economic, political and social development somewhat resembles that of their magic-practising ancestors. Since the economics of a society determines its social and political nature, primitive beliefs will survive in a primitive background.

Chapter 2 : Animism and the Practice of Snakecraft

1. Magic is also thought to have originated in the form of fertility rites—what the primitives believed would enhance human and natural productivity. The main concern, of course, was physical survival, which also ensured the perpetuation of the human race. Survival was intimately linked to the procurement of food and protection from natural calamities like floods, drought, earthquakes as well as from jungle predators, According to primitive logic the propitiation of nature and her creatures would ensure that survival. Magic probably originated at the stage when men still hunted and had just entered the agricultural stage (Chapter 15: Conclusion). That may be the explanation for the cave paintings of half-animal, half-human forms. Animal worship can also possibly be traced to that stage.

Chapter 3 : The Death Dealers

These cases illustrate a salient point: the medium through which a spirit can be captured or someone harmed is generally a creation of nature—a product of the soil, food (such as millet, rice, lemon, even milk). This emphasizes the materialist nature of magic, where even the supernatural is controlled by the earth—hence the logic behind nature worship.

The potency ascribed to a foetus can be traced back to the power with which the sexual act was credited by the magicians of old days. Even contemporary tantrics believe in it. If creativity has potency, so would creation, specially when it is being energized by the life-giving forces of the productive female.

Chapter 4 : Metamorphosing Witches

1. The Yakshi's image as a beautiful but fatal creature (expressed by her original, fearsome form) is possibly a throwback to the potency ascribed to woman's seductive powers. A plausible explanation is that during Vedic times when everything temporal began to be despised and the goal of life became moksha—a relief from earthly attachment—carnal desires (being a very strong attachment to the body and hence to this world) came to be looked down upon. Women, because of their fertility, were immediately associated with sex, and also, because they had suffered subjugation in the male-oriented society, they came to be dubbed 'gateways to hell', because of the irresistible physical attraction they held for men.

Chapter 5 : Black Magic and the Hindu Scriptures

The similarity of human nature is such that races other than the Aryans also came to the same conclusion regarding natural phenomena, and very similar rites came to be practised in different parts of the world. These rites existed in Dravidian-dominated South India, too, before the advent of the Aryans.

Chapter 6 : Instruments and Practices

1. The pubic hair suggested sex—which interfered with the spirituality of the image—bringing about a clash between the temporal and the spiritual—resulting in the victory of the temporal in the embodiment of the son's sexual partner—the wife.

2. Kumkum and red flowers are offered because they signify blood. (because of their colour) and wine is offered because its intoxication causes one to feel as though one were possessed of a power greater than one's own. This illusory enhancement of one's energy was construed to mean supernatural strength and hence wine came to be offered.

Chapter 7 : Local Forms of Magic

1. Using menstrual blood would mean interfering in the woman's biological functions. It can also be used for inciting lust in her, since the menses are necessarily associated with a woman's fertility.

2. This kind of subjugation of woman can again be traced back to the beginnings of that society on which our own is modelled—the patrilineal society, in which man became the doer and the woman the passive receiver. This tendency manifested itself in sexual rites, too.

3. 'Unhealthy' here stands for anything that is inimical to life.

4. The coconut is used in many fertility rites. It is the fruit of the earth which, by similarity, helps a woman bear the fruit of *her* fertility—a child.

5. The three activities symbolize human life in a nutshell. By their imitation, the primitive hopes to 'inspire' nature into similar health and productivity. An agricultural economy, in this case, retains the rites and their original significance.

6. It never occurred to him that the colleague could be depressed because of real problems and not fictional ones like the kicking around of lemons and chillies!

Chapter 8 : Christian "Ghoulash"

1. This is the basic difference between black magic rites here and abroad. In Europe, they are something superimposed on a culture which has little use for rites. These rituals add mystery and drama to humdrum lives. Witchcraft believers among Indian Christians, however, follow them like a code of conduct, backed by a tangible ideology that derives its strength from their material circumstances.

Chapter 9 : The Muslim Menagerie

Water and the cemetery have significance as environments. Water is considered a life-preserving substance that sustains plant and animal life. Hence it is important in the rituals of most communities. The "holy water" of the Hindus and that of the Christians are also examples of this manifestation. A cemetery is important because it is the place that holds the remains of a body that once had life—and it is believed to be a haunt of spirits. Both environments have links with life and death processes, hence the entirely materialistic notion of their being 'ideal' surroundings for 'awakening' the dead.

Chapter 10 : Beejamantras

1. This may seem to contradict our early theory of the twin aspects of gods, but it is actually a matter of opinion. Each man suits his

needs and worships the god/goddess of his choice in a manner suiting his own temperament. Consequently, it is his privilege to imbue them with a personality that he himself wishes to 'see' in them. This only serves to drive in the point that man can do what he wishes with the divinities created by him. In this case, Mohammed Yusuf practised the Brahmin version of Hindu rites (sticking to Hindu ceremonies) so it would be natural to put Durga (a Vedic deity) on a pedestal.

Chapter 11 : Tantra Magic

1. This is a deviation from the normal fertility rites which characterize witchcraft; the normal rites are a celebration of life, rather than its negation.

Chapter 12 : The Aftermath of a Curse : Case Histories

1. More likely than not, it is hearsay that has become part of the region's folklore.

Chapter 13 : The Antidote

1. Some doctors, too, in these types of cases, prefer the conventional 'cure' of exorcists, as faith in these people sometimes heals the patient faster than would medicines.

2. Here, too, the coconut is being used as a symbol of fertility, which is common to most magical rites.

3. Obviously, it is a question of each to his own preference, and not the operation of any mystical principle, universal to all belief.

4. ॐ signifies 'OM' — which is the sacred Hindu syllable.

Chapter 14 : Consequences

1. As in the primitive Indian communities, here too the accusation of witchcraft was used for political and social ends.

2 Later, there were other rumours claiming the motive to be political. Even if it was political, the fact remains that it was publicized as a revenge by the people on suspected black magicians, proving that an accusation of witchcraft, specially its black aspect, is still used as a tool or an excuse to victimize someone, as it was and still is in primitive communities.

Chapter 15 : Conclusion

1. Here we should refer again to Frazer's contention that the primitives believed in a form of telepathy. Though Frazer's critics categorically feel that no telepathy was involved in the primitive's system of beliefs, telepathy is today not entirely ruled out.

GLOSSARY

All words are Sanskrit, except where otherwise indicated

aghori: one who practises *tantra* for evil purposes
agni chakra: the fifth stage in the rise of the Kundalini
amavasya: new moon day
amrit: ambrosia, nectar (It is believed that a person who drinks *amrit* will not die.)
anahata chakra: the third stage in the rise of the Kundalini
animan siddhi: the faculty of being able to reduce matter to the most minute
anjan: black eye-salve
asana: posture
Ashada: the fourth month of the Hindu calender (corresponding to June—July)
Ashada Amavasya: the last day of *Ashada*
Ashtamangalya: horoscope reading
ausadhija siddhi: powers gained from the exact use of herbs, drugs and elixirs
avahan: invoking of a spirit, and trapping it into an object, thus rendering it harmless
ayat: chapter (Arabic)
Bhanamati: witchcraft ritual in which a ragdoll is pricked with pins and hidden in the victim's house (Marathi)
beej-akshara: 'seed' syllable
beejamantra: 'seed' or basic chant
bhogya: to be enjoyed
bhootham: ghosts (Tamil)
bongas: spirits (Oriya)
buddhisthambham: physical immobility
chakra: magic circle which protects one from evil spirits; *also* a part of the subtle body (e.g. *mooladhara chakra*)
chathan: spirit worshipped by those practising mantra magic in Kerala (Malayalam)
chureil: vampire (Hindi)
dakshinacharya: right-handed path of Tantra
dargah: tomb (Arabic)

devata: god or good spirit
devi: goddess
dhyana: mental visualisation of deity and meditation on it
guru: teacher
gurudi: a turmeric and lime substitute for blood used in rituals
hadal: spirit of a woman dead in childbirth (Marathi)
hakim: Muslim medicine man (Arabic)
haldi: turmeric
Hathayoga: the science of breath control and postures
henda: country wine (Kannada)
homum: puja, religious ceremony (Tamil)
ishittva siddhi: supreme power
jahannum: hell (Arabic)
janmaja siddhi: powers coexistent with birth
japa: repetitive chanting of the name of a deity
jinnats: spirits (Arabic)
kafir: non-believer (Arabic)
kajal: see *anjan*
kariman siddhi: power of being able to make objects heavy
karma: the Hindu philosophy that a man will be rewarded for his good actions and punished for his evil ones
karna: ear
Karva Bhagat: black magician (Hindi)
khabiz: ghosts (Arabic)
korava: one who is able to detect concealed objects which bring illness or bad luck to a house (Malayalam)
kshudra devata: demon gods
kula: incantation
kumkum: red powder, used in religious ceremonies
Kundalini: sex-energy, also known as serpent power, which when released is said to transport an individual to the heights of spiritual ecstasy
lahiman siddhi: the power of levitation
lingam: penis
madya: wine
mahiman siddhi: the faculty of being able to expand without limit
maithuna: sexual union
mana: house (i.e. family) (Malayalam)
mandala: magic circle; *also* platform or seat
mandapam: stage (Tamil)
manipuraka chakra: *see anahata chakra*
mansa: meat
mantraja siddhi: powers stemming from skill at mantrayana
mantrayana: chanting of mantras
mantrochharya: frequent repeating of mantras
maran: death
matsya: fish

maukil: good spirit (Arabic)
mooladhara chakra: the resting place of the *Kundalini*, below the genitals and above the rectum
mooth marana: murder from a distance (Marathi)
mudra: gesture; *also* food-grain
muhurtham: auspicious moment at which a ceremony may be performed (Tamil)
niyama: postures
nyasa: identification of beejamantras with parts of the body
oddiyan: witchcraft-practising foetus snatcher, believed to be a human in animal form
padma: lotus (representing the vagina)
padmasana: lotus posture
panchamundi: five skulls, upon which tantrics may sit while meditating
phatki: alum salts (Marathi)
pir: Muslim saint (Arabic)
pisacha: ghost
prana: subtle body, life
pranayama: practice of breath control
prapti siddhi: knowledge of everything past, present and future
prasadam: gift or blessing from a deity, sometimes in the form of sweetmeats or fruit (Tamil)
pratihara: sense withdrawal
pretas: spirits
puja: religious ceremony
pujya: holy, to be worshipped
purnima: full moon day
rekha: line
sadhaka: tantric
sahasrara chakra: the top of the head, the highest level to which the Kundalini can rise
samadhi: union with the almighty
samadhija siddhi: power derived from intense meditation
samarasa: unity
sadhana: act performed with great perseverence (in this case the practice of Tantra)
sandhya: meditation on the subtle body (chakras) and on the release of the Kundalini Shakti
sandhyabhasha: twilight language
saptamundi: seven skulls upon which tantrics may sit while meditating
sarayi: country wine (Kannada)
sattvic (foods): foods, excluding meat, fish, eggs, onions, strong spices or oils etc.
shaitan: devil (Arabic)
shuddhi: the five ingredients of the tantric sadhana (*madya, matsya, mansa, mudra, maithuna*)

swadhishthana chakra: the second stage in the rise of the Kundalini
syphili: evil spirits (Arabic)
tapaja siddhi: powers produced by penance
tapasya: severe penance and self-abnegation
tarpana: purification
taweez: talisman (Arabic)
thullal: frenzied dancing (Malayalam)
tona: practice of bewitching a person by introducing objects, made 'evil' by mantras, into his house (Hindi)
ustad: teacher, guide (Arabic)
vajra: rock (representing the penis)
vamacharya: left-handed path in tantra
vashikarana: hypnosis
velchapad: a village sub-priest who performs penance (Malayalam)
vibhuti: holy ash
vidya: knowledge
virasana: half-lotus pose
vishudhi chakra: the fourth stage in the rise of the Kundalini
yagna: religious sacrifice
yakshi: a ghoul revitalized, sometimes by a black magician (Malayalam)
yama: truth and non-violence
yantra: form, structure, design
yoga: union between creator and creation (a later definition)
yogini: the female partner of the sadhaka
yoni: vagina

Also from Orient Longman

Gurus, Godmen and Good People

edited by Khushwant Singh

"I have seen people on the verge of nervous breakdown restored to mental health; epileptics cured of epilepsy; drug addicts rid of drug addiction; diabetics able to produce their own insulin; even serious physical injury which had stubbornly refused to yield to medical treatment respond to the healing touch of a Guru", writes Khushwant Singh in his introduction to *Gurus, Godmen and Good People.* This book explores the lives, teachings and unusual powers of twelve of India's holy men and women, and the fervent devotion they inspire, told, for the most part, in the words of their own disciples.

Titles in

Sangam Books

In the Shadow of the Gallows

C. A. Balan

One cold September night in 1950, C. A. Balan was hunted down and arrested on the charge of a political murder for which he was later convicted. This book is a compelling account of the eleven years he spent in jail waiting to be hanged.

Trials of Strength

A. S. R. Chari

In a famous criminal lawyer's own words, the accounts of several sensational trials in which he appeared for the defence. Among the charges were libel, fraud, dacoity and murder.

A young woman in her twenties, Sohaila Kapur is a journalist employed at the *Times of India*. An ex-student of Delhi University, she studied for and received her degree in political science. As a trainee journalist with the *Times* she fulfilled her decade-long interest in the occult, by going down to Kerala "to find out the truth" for herself. What resulted were two articles on the subject, written in collaboration with a colleague, which were published in the *Times of India's Sunday Review*. It was at that time that the book was conceived and after another year of research, it was completed.

The author is also a theatre enthusiast, having acted in a number of plays since her school days. She now plans to direct plays and ballets for the stage.

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